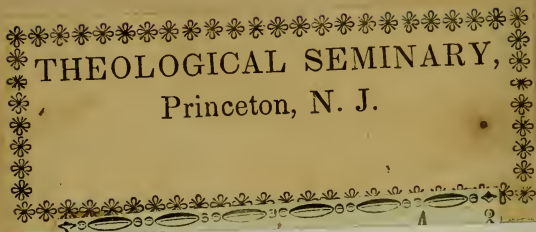
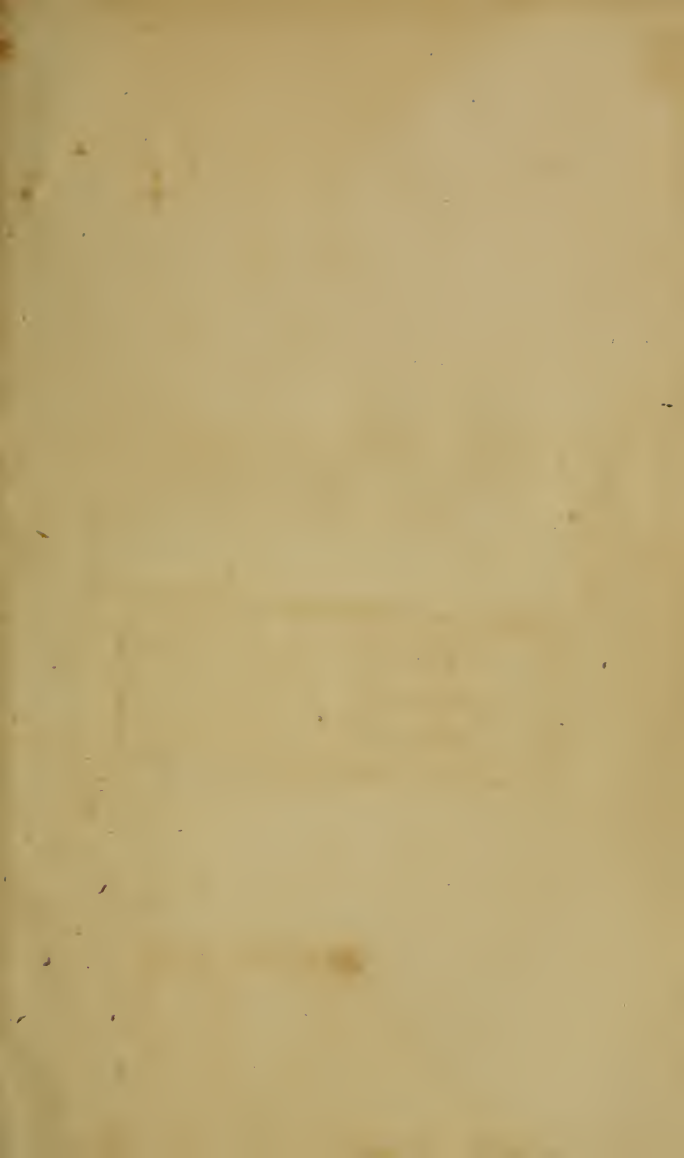


38-5-



THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
Princeton, N. J.

BS 413 .B58 v.33
Couard, Christian Ludwig,
1793-1865.
The life of Christians
during the first three



1

✓

THE
BIBLICAL CABINET;
OR
HERMENEUTICAL, EXEGETICAL,
AND
PHILOLOGICAL LIBRARY.

VOL. XXXIII.

COUARD ON THE LIFE OF CHRISTIANS DURING THE
FIRST THREE CENTURIES OF THE CHURCH.

EDINBURGH:
THOMAS CLARK, 38 GEORGE STREET;
HAMILTON, ADAMS & CO. LONDON;
AND W. CURRY JUN. & CO. DUBLIN.

MDCCCXLI.

EDINBURGH :
PRINTED BY MACPHERSON & SYME,
31 EAST ROSE LANE.

THE
LIFE OF CHRISTIANS
DURING
THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES OF
THE CHURCH.

A SERIES OF
SERMONS ON CHURCH HISTORY.

BY
DR CHR. LUDW. COUARD.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN
BY
LEOPOLD J. BERNAYS.

EDINBURGH:
THOMAS CLARK, 38 GEORGE STREET.

MDCCCXLI.

TO THE WORTHY AND RESPECTED
MEMBERS OF THE THEOLOGICAL FACULTY OF THE
ROYAL UNIVERSITY AT BERLIN,

DRS A. D. CHR. TWESTEN,
PHIL. MARHEINECKE,
AUG. NEANDER,
E. W. HENGSTENBERG,
FR. STRAUZ,

THIS WORK,

IS, WITH GRATEFUL REVERENCE AND SINCEREST LOVE,

DEDICATED,

BY THE

AUTHOR.



	Page
TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE,	ix
AUTHOR'S PREFACE,	xv
SERMON I.	
ON PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY,	1
SERMON II.	
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE OF GOD,	16
SERMON III.	
THE LIFE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS A LIFE OF LOVE,	30
SERMON IV.	
THE ZEAL IN PRAYER OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS,	44
SERMON V.	
THE WORTHY VIEW OF THEIR CALLING HELD BY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS,	58
SERMON VI.	
THE EARNESTNESS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS IN FORSAKING THE WORLD,	71
SERMON VII.	
THE EARNESTNESS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS IN FORSAKING THE WORLD,	85
SERMON VIII.	
THE CONDUCT OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN TIMES OF PER- SECUTION,	99
SERMON IX.	
THE CONDUCT OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS UNDER PERSECUTION,	112

	Page
SERMON X.	
THE CONDUCT OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS IN THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS WORLD,	126
SERMON XI.	
THE CEREMONIES WITH WHICH THE EARLY CHRISTIANS SOLEMNIZED THE MEMORY OF THE DEPARTED,	140
SERMON XII.	
THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS,	152
SERMON XIII.	
THE HOLY SEASONS IN THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,	166
SERMON XIV.	
OF THE DIVINE SERVICES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,	179
SERMON XV.	
OF THE DIVINE SERVICES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,	192
SERMON XVI.	
OF THE DIVINE SERVICES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,	207
SERMON XVII.	
OF THE NATURE OF PENANCE IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH,	221
SERMON XVIII.	
OF THE NATURE OF PENANCE IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH,	233
SERMON XIX.	
THE PUBLIC AND CIVIL LIFE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS,	247
SERMON XX.	
THE FAMILY LIFE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS,	261

APPENDIX.

SHORT NOTICES OF THE LIVES AND ACTIONS OF THE TEACHERS OF THE CHURCH INTRODUCED IN THE FOREGOING DIS- COURSES, ..	277
INDEX TO THE QUOTATIONS FROM THE FATHERS,	283

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

IN giving to the English public the following discourses on the History of the Primitive Church, I have been actuated neither by the eloquence of the language, nor the novelty of the views contained in them, but simply by the lively and practical piety which they display, and the necessity which seems to have arisen in these days for exhortations of the kind. At a time when German theology has assumed so questionable a character, and has become so justly suspected in a country where religious speculation has always been confined within modest bounds, I should have hesitated at introducing a new work from thence, unless I were fully convinced of the general scriptural integrity of its views. In this case, however, the difficulty has been entirely removed by the fact, that these Sermons have for their groundwork Dr Neander's celebrated History of the Early Church, a work known in this country through the admirable version of it by the Reverend Henry Rose, whose preface bears a handsome testimony to its *general* orthodoxy, and which was pronounced by his brother, the late Christian advocate, to be the most truly Christian history of the church ever yet published. I trust this will be a guarantee sufficient for the *general* rectitude of the views here taken, and shall therefore leave it to the Christian charity of the reader, to excuse

any differences from his own opinion in those minor points, where such differences may fairly be allowed.

That the necessities of our times require that frequent appeals should be made to the simplicity of primitive Christian piety, is a point that, I think, will scarcely be questioned. It needs no querulous or discontented spirit to see a wide difference between the thoughts and views of this age upon religious subjects, and those of the primitive church. Whatever we may have gained in point of refinement and knowledge, we have lost much of that holy earnestness and simple childlike trust, whereby, in former times, the *whole* life, and not, as now, mere portions of it, was dedicated to God's honour and service. The almost inevitable accumulation of property into few hands, the daily increasing distance between the ranks of rich and poor, the love of empty display, and the consequent heavy demands of the world upon our attention, have left little time, and, perhaps, less inclination, for nobler pursuits and duties. The rich seem to have forgotten that they are but the stewards of the wealth that God has given them; the poor no longer remember that, "their's is the kingdom of heaven;" all classes seem to act practically as if religious duties were a heavy and burdensome task, instead of a grateful service. What the good Archbishop Leighton said of his times is but too true of ours, "The noises of coach-wheels, of their pleasures, and of their great affairs, so fill their ears, that the still voice, in which God is, cannot be heard." The pleasant breezes of prosperity have fanned God's church to sleep, and there needs something to awaken it. In these days of "soft clothing," we need to hear more of the desert and the sackcloth, the locusts and the wild honey; we

need, again, the voice of one crying in the wilderness to awake us from our sleep of death. Religion has become, in most cases, a matter so entirely distinct from actual life, that we have set apart fixed times and seasons, and those rare and with long intervals, for thinking on the high concerns of another life; and so convinced are we of the propriety of our conduct, that if the preacher ventures to make further demands on our time, if, in God's name, he asks us for our whole heart, we resent his conduct as an unwarranted and unreasonable encroachment upon the duties of active life. The early Christians succeeded in combining their duties to God with those which they owed to man; every thing they did was done in the Lord. In such times, therefore, and under such influences, we surely cannot hear too often of the strict severity, the unwearied watchfulness, the self-sacrificing charity of those first converts. They were, it is true, but men; and, as men, they had their faults, and those, too, of no inconsiderable magnitude; but they were men over whom the shadow of apostles and apostolic men had passed; they had caught the spirit of Christianity almost fresh from the lips of the Saviour; they had realised what, to most of us, is still a mystery, how we should live, yet so as it should not be we, but Christ living in us. To them, no day but was the Lord's day, no place but was the Lord's house, no minute but was the appointed time, the day of salvation. When the clouds of persecution, disease, or poverty, hung heavily over their fellows, it needed not, as unhappily is the case so often now, the pathetic eloquence of a favourite preacher to plead the cause of the poor; it needed no reiterated entreaties to make them minister to the necessities of their bro-

thren. They felt how Christ had loved them, and what obligation was thereby placed upon them to love their fellow sinners, and they hastened to contribute according as each had power. The world has thrown its dust into our eyes, and we do not see the wide and comprehensive duties of our religion as Christians once did. Such sermons, then, as these, which recall the world from its softness and apathy to the contemplation of those more sincere periods of the church's history, when believers were all of one mind, and one soul, full of love and of the Holy Ghost, surely are not out of place; and, I cannot but hope, that such writings may be some of the appointed means in the hand of God by which He will fulfil his promise regarding His church, "I will bring her into the wilderness, and there I will speak to her heart."

It would be well, too, if these discourses would lead Christians more to the writings of the earlier fathers of the church, in whom, amid many errors, are yet to be found purer reflections of the true Christian spirit than are generally to be met with in our days. To this end, I would hope, that the sound and practical piety of the quotations interspersed through these Sermons would materially contribute. Men of all parties have too much regarded the writings of the fathers as mere treasure-houses of doctrinal subtleties, and neglected to draw from them the vast stores of vital Christianity which are to be found in them. The extracts here given will, at all events, do their part in dispelling the ignorance which so much prevails concerning the character of the early church, and in leading men to form a juster estimate of its merits and claims on their attention and respect. If they shall contribute in the slightest degree

to produce this desirable end, and thus help to restore the reign of genuine Christian love and earnestness among us, they will have amply answered their purpose.

I have given, wherever I could obtain them, the references to the quotations from the fathers (which Dr Couard has omitted to do), but my means of ascertaining them has been almost entirely confined to the references given by the Reverend H. Rose, in his translation of Neander's Church History.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.



WE should strive to gain as much as possible for the pulpit from all theological subjects. Doctrine, morals, exegetics, must all serve us. Is then church history alone to be left to the professorial chair, and remain exclusively the property of theologians and educated laymen? Are we not to work the rich matter which it offers us into instruction and edification for our congregations, most of the members of which have no access to its treasures, if they are not opened to them in the church?

The Sermons which I here offer to the public give my answer to this question, and my view of the subject.

The idea of selecting an important and attractive portion of church history for the profit of my congregation, was entertained by me as early as the year 1825, when the first volume of the *Memorials of the History of Christianity and Christian Life* was published by Dr Neander. The second part of this, in which the Christian life of the three first centuries was treated of, had peculiar charms for me. I yet could not determine whether to select this portion of church history, or the equally interesting *History of the Reformation*. At last, I resolved to choose the former for the instruction, edification, and arousing of my hearers, and I trust my choice requires no vindication. The *History of the Reforma-*

tion may be considered as more known, since our youth are taught it before confirmation, and the more essential parts are treated of in the church at the time of the celebration of its memory. The history of the earlier times of the Christian church is less known, and was, from this very fact, likely to excite more interest. The sequel shewed that I was not mistaken. The sermons which I preached on the Trinity Sundays of 1838 and 1839 in the morning service, were listened to with marked sympathy and attention; and I was informed by many that the subject was found full of instruction and interest. May they have as much effect on the hearts and lives of my hearers as they have aroused sympathy in them, and may a rich blessing accompany the reading of them.

For the material of these discourses, I have to thank especially the excellent works of our revered church historian Neander, whose order I have generally followed. But neither have I omitted to look into and investigate the sources themselves where they were accessible to me. Whether I have succeeded in working up my materials for the profit and edification of my flock, properly qualified critics will decide. I, myself, consider my undertaking to be only a weak attempt, whose deficiencies I pray my readers to excuse; and I am well aware how far the execution of my task has been behind the mark which I proposed to myself. I shall be content if I receive credit for good intentions, and my work be declared not to have fallen completely short of its object.

CHR. LUDW. COUARD.

BERLIN, *April* 30. 1840.



ON

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.



SERMON I.

May the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost bless us! May He bless us, and may all the world fear Him. Amen.

The commemorative portion of the ecclesiastical year is now about to conclude, and the less festive division is approaching. We have now before us no fewer than twenty-four Sundays after the feast of the blessed Trinity, during which period it is my intention to give to my addresses to you a more continuous character, and I have for this purpose selected for their object, "an account of the life of Christians during the first ages of the Church." The contemplations which have been suggested to us by the commemorations we have just concluded, must have refreshed in us all the firm and stable groundwork on which our holy faith is builded up. They must have shewn us most incontrovertibly that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." It will be our task, during many succeeding Sabbaths, to examine how this salvation, which has been manifested in Christ, may best be accepted and employed, and how our faith in the incarnate Son of God, our crucified, risen, and glorified Redeemer, may be expressed, and its truth made evident. Such cou-

siderations will, I trust, tend to direct our minds to the workings and fruits of faith, and while they picture to us its influence on the thoughts and lives of the earlier Christians, give us the means of ascertaining how far the life of each of us is one of faith in the Lord, is, in fact, that of a true Christian. But this representation of a Christian life, as it should grow up under the fostering shade of the Church, will doubtless be more attractive, and full of instruction, if we trace how, from the earliest times, this life has been developed and expressed, and what influence faith then exercised on the hearts and minds of believers. And while, during this inquiry, we hold up to your view the several parts of a Christian's life, we shall be stripping you of every pretence and excuse which you might advance, as though the gospel required of you any thing impossible or unattainable. What it *does* demand of us has been already exhibited in the works and fruits of faith during the earlier ages of the Church, and what faith did then for them, it can do now for us, if we do not harden our hearts against it, and resist its heavenly influence. During this season, then, my brethren, we will enter on the field of church history, and, I trust, we shall reap some benefit from paying our undivided attention to this subject.

The subject of our discourse upon the last Sunday, will permit of our following it up, by making a few preliminary remarks, before entering on the subject itself. It was then that man's regeneration,—his second birth, was, by the ordinances of the church, the subject of our meditation. This springs from faith on Christ Jesus, and, consequently, to be born again, to be renewed or converted, bear nearly the same meaning. For, if a man be in Christ (and we are in Christ through faith) he is a new creature, "old things have passed away, behold all things are become new." Wherever, therefore, faith is, there is union with Christ, there is the second birth, and man becomes a new creature;—but where faith is not, we dare not speak of the conversion, regeneration, or renewal of men. Many and

various have been the ways in which the wisdom and love of God have led men to Christ, and by which the work of conversion has and does still proceed :—and to these various ways of turning unto Christ, I purpose this day to direct your attention, before I consider the Christian life of those already converted ; and may God bless our labour, and turn it to our everlasting profit. Amen.

TEXT. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, &c. &c. &c.—St John's Gospel, iii. 1–15.

A man must be born again, if he will be saved. Of this truth our Lord warns us with peculiar earnestness and emphasis: " Verily, verily I say unto you," saith he to Nicodemus, " except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Now a man is said to be born again, or converted, when he is torn away from his natural, lost, carnal and sinful state, led by a lively faith to Christ, and thus made spiritually one with Him. Wherefore it is that our Lord says, " That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." So soon, therefore, as a man is born again, his life is no longer a carnal, worldly, sinful, ungodly one ; a Christian life commences in him, a life rather of Christ himself in him, as it was with the holy Apostle when he could exclaim, " I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Now there are many ways in which God leads men to Christ, to the end that through faith in his blood they should be converted, born again, or renewed. In this case, also, " the wind bloweth where it listeth." God leads each man by a different path, according to his peculiar disposition, a John differently from a Peter, a Peter from a Paul : yet for all there is one only goal, to which God's grace conducts them by different ways, and this goal is Christ Jesus, and redemption through his blood. Let us begin, then, this day our representation of the Christian life during the first ages of the Church, by a contemplation of the various modes by which God, in his wisdom, turns men to Christ. In every case, indeed, it is the word of

truth, the Gospel itself, by which souls are won over to Christ and his kingdom, but it is equally certain that the revealed word does not make the desired impression upon all alike. Men's hearts must first be prepared and made ready for the reception of gospel truth, and for this purpose God employs many modes; such as, 1st, Bodily infirmities; 2dly, The longing of the soul after happiness; 3dly, The consciousness of sin; 4thly, A certain moral striving after good; 5thly, Simplicity of mind; 6thly, An earnest inquiry after truth.

Such were the means we find employed during the time that our Lord lived and ministered upon earth; such were they in the first times of the Church, such they still continue to be; and they will furnish us to-day with the subject of a brief, and, I trust, not unprofitable inquiry.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. That bodily infirmities led many to believe on the Lord, while he was yet a sojourner upon earth, is a fact known to every reader of the sacred Scriptures. No higher desires were as yet awakened in them, and it was therefore needful that they should be roused from their stupor, before they could be brought into that condition and state of mind which would make them fit recipients of the glad tidings of the gospel. Many men who claved to the earthly as the end of all their desires, were, by the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, awakened by means of their bodily infirmities. Their sickness and sufferings compelled them to go to Christ, of whose miraculous powers they had already heard; and accordingly we find him always environed by the halt and the blind, the possessed, and those afflicted with divers diseases, imploring his powerful aid. They sought in their misery help and consolation of one to whom they never appealed in vain. With condescending kindness and love He revealed to them all his might and majesty; He healed all their infirmities; He

became their benefactor, and by this induced them to give ear to himself and to his doctrine. Thus he made them capable of receiving his more precious and enduring gifts, so that at last they believed on Him, and He became to them a benefactor in the highest sense of the word, and delivered them from their inward spiritual wretchedness. Thus was it with many possessed by unclean spirits, thus with the Canaanitish women, thus with him who was born blind, and many others. By the way of bodily infirmities they were led to Christ, and induced to believe on Him and His holy Gospel.

When, after His ascension, His apostles went about to preach the word of truth, their experience was the same. St John and St Peter healed a man who had been lame from his mother's womb, by calling on the name of Jesus, and he believed on the Lord. The paralytic Eneas of Lydda was made whole by a miracle, and he, with many others, were turned unto the Lord. The like often occurred during the first ages of the Church. The afflicted and the sick were often healed by pious Christians, who, in humble faith, prayed to the Lord in their behalf, and by the aid they had received were led to forsake the worship of idols, to turn to Christ as the true physician of their souls, and dedicate their lives to His service. The early Christian writers frequently appealed to such miracles in their apologies to the heathen. Thus, among others, Justin Martyr writes: "Ye can perceive from the things that happen before your eyes, for many of us Christians have, by calling on the name of the crucified Jesus, healed in your sight not a few possessed by evil spirits, and still continue to heal them." And at the end of the second century, Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, writes: "In the name of the Son of God doth each of his disciples labour to do good unto all men, according to the gifts which he hath received. Some drive out evil spirits, whereby those who were before-time possessed are led to believe on Him, and to become members of His church. Others heal the sick by the imposition of hands; and not a few dead men have

been restored to life, who also have since dwelt many years among us."

And as in those early times bodily infirmities were the means of converting many, so are they also in our own. Many a one among us has been trained for Christ in the school of tribulation and affliction, and many have been led through poverty, sickness, or other crosses, to believe on Him. Many a one had gone on in his sins, had not the wholesome chastening of the Lord brought him back, like the prodigal son, to his father's house. "Through much tribulation we hearken to thy word," saith the Scripture, and, "Lord, in the time of trouble will they call on thee." Christian brethren ! bless your sorrows, your crosses, your afflictions, if, through them, you have been led to believe on your Saviour. And let him among us who has still to bear his cross, think that it is the Lord who seeks him, and knocks at the door of his heart, and let him surrender to him his whole heart and life, that his bodily infirmities may become a source of everlasting joy.

II. Man's natural longing after happiness is another instrument by which the infinite wisdom of the Father draws men to the Son, that in Him they may find that which they seek, true happiness and eternal life. When the Lord sojourned upon earth, there were many who longed for the redemption of Israel, and who therefore heartily desired the appearance of the promised Messiah, in whom they trusted that it was he that should bring this redemption to his people. Such an one was that Nicodemus, of whom our text speaks ; such were the first disciples of our Lord, Andrew and Simon, James and John, and Nathaniel, and many others, as Joseph of Arimathea, who all lived in faith on the old promises of God, and whose expectations were greatly increased by the preaching of John the Baptist. When, therefore, the Lord did appear, being strongly moved by the signs and wonders which he performed, they recognised in him the promised seed, as Nicodemus expressly acknowledges in the text : " Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher

come from God ; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." But yet all their desires, and all their hopes of the Messiah were of a very earthly and temporal character. They dreamed of political freedom ; and while they thought only of deliverance from the Roman yoke, and of the re-establishment of the ancient kingdom of David, they had no conception of a spiritual redemption and deliverance from the yoke of sin. Of this expectation, however, our Lord took advantage to engraft thereon his teaching concerning the kingdom of God, and led the expectants on, step by step, to acknowledge that his kingdom was not meat and drink, and sensual pleasure, and earthly glory, but a heavenly kingdom of justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ; and that its only end was the redemption of a sinful world. Thus, instead of those meaner things for which they hoped, they found the loftiest for which they could have sighed in the inmost recesses of their hearts, the glorious liberty of the sons of God, a blessed and eternal life in faith on the Lord.

And must not all who were actuated by this impulse, wherever they might previously have been driven by this longing after peace and joy, have come to Christ, so soon as his Gospel announced to them its message of rest and salvation ? Thus Cornelius came to the Lord. His whole being longed for repose and peace, and salvation, and it was therefore that the preaching of Peter so impressed him, that he and all his house turned unto Jesus ; for he felt, as he heard the words of peace, deeply and certainly, that if peace were to be found any where, it was to be found in faith on Christ. How many a heathen who, like Cornelius, felt those yearnings within him, which found no satisfaction in the possession and enjoyment of earthly things, must have come to Christ, especially when he saw the professors of the gospel, even amid pains and tortures, so divinely cheerful, so full of peace and happiness ? What is it, he must have asked himself, which, even in the immediate prospect of death, makes these men so joyous, and fills their

hearts with such peace? I must learn that doctrine which so inspires them, which gives them strength to sacrifice and to suffer all things for their faith's sake. And when he did learn it, must he not in every case have been overpowered and convinced by its divine truth?

And probably, even in those times, many Christians have been thus in reality led to Christ. To be happy is the sincerest wish of us all; and when we are once convinced that nothing on earth, whether money or land, whether honour or distinction, whether sensual or worldly gratification, can suffice to give us peace, that all is vain and transitory, that nothing here below can content the real wants of our hearts, then, and then only, we turn our desires to Him, who says to us, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" to Him whom thousands praise as their Saviour, in whom they have found peace and health, and comfort and joy, and from whom, when we have given our hearts up to him, we shall ourselves experience the strength and blessing of His love, and shall be ever bound to him, who gives to them that are his all life and fulness of pleasure, and who will give us more than we can either desire or hope for.

III. The consciousness also of sin, once aroused in the heart, is to many a means by which the Father draws them to the Son, for this consciousness excites as certainly a desire for aid and salvation, as a feeling of bodily sickness leads us to seek for the help of the physician. It was on this account that publicans and sinners, those, who being crushed beneath the heavy weight of sin, could not be relieved under the law from the intolerable burden, thronged round our blessed Saviour. Yes! and He had come to save sinners; not to thrust them from him with pharisaical pride, but to receive them with boundless love. Among all that needed comfort they needed it the most, and therefore he met them with heavenly friendliness and mildness, and healed the wounds of their broken and contrite hearts with the

balm of heavenly mercy. He proclaimed to them that their sins were forgiven, and they believed His gospel, and loved him who had first so unspeakably loved them. How blessed was Mary Magdalene in looking on him who had forgiven all her sin, and blotted out all her iniquity. And when, at that first Whitsuntide, the preaching of Peter so powerfully awoke in the hearts of the three thousand the consciousness of sin, was it not this feeling which drove them to Christ, and prompted that anxious question, "Men and brethren what shall we do to be saved?" and which led them to believe on Him whom the apostles proclaimed to them to be the only Saviour and forgiver of sins? The consciousness of guilt and moral depravity worked powerfully in those times on the hearts of many heathens, who, writhing under the pangs of conscience, and a fearful expectation of divine wrath, sought in vain for peace and consolation from their priests and magicians, in vain brought offerings to their gods,—their souls could find thereby no rest. What an impression must the Gospel have made upon spirits so laden with the sense of guilt, promising, as it did, the mercy of God to all who repented humbly of their sins! With what joy must they have hastened to embrace that faith which gave them power to become sons of God.

Yet this it was that gave the unbelieving enemies of Christianity occasion to scoff at it, in that it was wont to find such easy reception among the vilest sinners. "Let us hear," says one of them, Celsus, about the middle of the second century, "what sort of men are called by the Christians. The kingdom of God will receive all who are sinners, all who are ignorant, all who are miserable. They affirm that God will receive the sinner, if he humble himself, but will not accept the just, who look up to him with a consciousness of virtue." Thus did he despise the Gospel for its highest benefit, because too much blinded by the conceit of his virtue to acknowledge its goodness; and thus did he verify the word of the apostle, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit." Yes! the gospel

is a message of mercy to humbled sinners ; but to proud, self-righteous Pharisees Christ is no Saviour. And therefore, even now, we see all who, like that heathen, are blind to their soul-destroying sins, mocking and reviling the Lord and his Gospel, because they think that they may boast before God of their virtue and their works, and need no Saviour and no Redeemer. But where men acknowledge their sin, and feel their misery, this consciousness of guilt will, in most cases, lead them to turn and believe on Him who can always save them who come unto God by Him.

And how many may there be among us whom the sense of guilt, and the lively persuasion that nothing but grace can save *them*, have turned to Christ as their redeemer, and now acknowledge, to the praise of His name, that " His mercy hath compassed them about." Oh that all sinners had a just sense of their misery. Oh that they all would fly to Him in repentance and faith, who proclaims to them the love and mercy of God, and gives them the comforting tidings of forgiveness of sins, that they may find rest for their souls, and that peace which the world cannot give. Hear now, all ye who mourn your past transgressions, what the Saviour himself assures you : " And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

IV. But this consciousness of guilt did not in all cases lead to faith on the Saviour. Many, in the perverted hardness of their hearts, stumbled at and hated a gospel which shewed them their wretchedness, rebuked their sins, and so earnestly called on them to repent. In them is the word of the Lord fulfilled, " Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." In all times there have been unhappy men, who " loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil." On the other hand, those were often more easily turned to Christ, who had been before accustomed to an earnest moral

striving after good, as was the case with Nicodemus, and the first disciples of our Saviour. When such men were carrying on within them the strife between the flesh and the spirit, or when they saw the divine majesty of Jesus in his earthly pilgrimage, or when they were first clearly taught by his word what really belonged to a holy life, and how far they were away from the goal, how gladly must they have joined themselves to Him, who presented to them a perfect example of a holy soul and life, what a vivid impression must his words have made on their minds, as he promised to lead them to the desired goal, to relieve them from the galling yoke of sin, if they would follow him in faith? Their first strivings after good made them capable of receiving this faith, and drew them with irresistible power to Him, who not only approved of this striving, but shewed it its sure goal, and assured it the victory, by the aid of His spirit, in its contests with ungodly lusts. It was often the case afterwards that earnestly minded heathens were thus converted to Christianity. They were witnesses of the pious, holy lives of faithful Christians, who walked among them as "children of light," and who "shewed forth the praises of Him, who had called them out of darkness into his own marvellous light;" and the example of such disciples of the Lord made such a deep and overpowering impression on their minds, that they turned themselves to that gospel whose divine power was so gloriously manifested in the lives of its professors. It was thus that Origen, in the third century, could say, "We can point out more who have been converted from a life not thoroughly depraved, than those who have been recovered from the more fearful and degrading sins." Our experience, my brethren, is similar. Wherever a man has already this moral earnestness, and humble striving after good, the gospel easily commends itself to him, and finds entrance into his heart and mind and life, and, by its hallowing plastic influence, renews them, whilst light-minded worldlings, and wicked slaves of sin, remain far off from the kingdom of God. Your purpose, then, in action, must

be to become truly good, and to live a holy life ; and if it be so, be sure God's grace will guide your will, and lead you to believe on Christ ; and He will strengthen your weakness, quiet your anxiety to be rid of sin, and secure you in the contest with fleshly lusts, by the aid of His holy spirit. And then, if at any time you are ready to exclaim with the apostle, " Ah ! wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death ? " you will be able to join also in his triumphant answer, " I thank God, who has given us the victory, by our Lord Jesus Christ."

V. A simple mind also, a want of worldly education, frequently made it more easy for men to turn to Christ. We know from the Gospels, that the so-called educated, those who thought themselves wise and prudent—the Scribes, the Priests, and the Pharisees—not only remained far from Christ, but even opposed him violently, while the ignorant and untaught multitudes hung upon his words ; and he himself saith : " I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." They were hindered by no false learning, no imaginary wisdom, from seeing the light which the gospel shed upon them : they could not pride themselves on their knowledge ; they therefore sought for no arts, but committed themselves in humble confidence to the teaching of Jesus, and his powerful words led them irresistibly on. Thus, in later years, the lower and less educated heathen were more easily converted than those who deemed themselves wise and prudent. These followed in simplicity the impulse of their hearts, and they felt the doctrines of the gospel speak home to them, lighten and refresh them : it is on this account that the heathen Celsus took occasion to scoff at Christianity, saying, that the most ignorant and uneducated were its most zealous followers and preachers ; while Athenagoras, who in the second century defended the Christian faith, acknowledges this with pride, and bears witness to it : " Among us," says he,

“ you will find the ignorant and the labourer, and old women, who, although they cannot express to you in words the healing influence of our Christian doctrine, yet prove it both in thought and action.” And even in these days, those who most easily surrender their minds to the truth are the poor, the untaught, and the lowly, who are not perverted or blinded by false wisdom. Their simple minds do not understand how to quibble and question : their hearts find all they are in need of in the gospel, and therefore they receive it willingly, and gladly follow that Saviour who refreshes them that travail, and are heavy laden. Such men are far happier in their simplicity than those proud witlings who, for very wisdom, are unable to come to Christ, who think themselves far too clever to embrace heartily a doctrine which they think is intended only for the common people. A single eye and a simple mind are indeed pearls of great price, and nothing is so clearly proved among us as that saying of the apostle, that “ not many wise men after the flesh are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” Let our highest wisdom, my brethren, be to acknowledge that of ourselves we know nothing of heavenly things, and to surrender ourselves with singleness of heart to His teaching, who hath revealed to us all things that make for our peace and happiness.

VI. We do not however mean, by any means, to assert, that only the uneducated and ignorant are fitted for the reception of the gospel, or that knowledge and education are, under all circumstances, a hinderance to faith. Did not Nicodemus come to the Lord, and was he not a doctor of the law, and a master in Israel ? And does not experience teach us that the want of intellectual training often unfits men for the kingdom of God, because, with such a want, wildness and superstition are not unfrequently connected. We do not at all mean to encourage a state of ignorance, when we praise that simplicity of mind, which, free from pedantry, and that wisdom which darkeneth counsel, seeks

and finds contentment and peace in faith on the gospel, and we by no means reprobate true education and earnest inquiry after truth; nay, rather we affirm that this earnest inquiry itself is to many the appointed faith by which God's wisdom leads them to believe on His Son. This was the case with many highly educated heathens in the early times of the Church. They sought anxiously after truth, but their wisdom taught them nothing that could appease the cravings of their minds, or satisfy the yearnings of their hearts. They acknowledged the folly of their idolatry: heathenism failed to content, nay it even repelled them, but they had nothing to which they could cling amid their doubts, nothing with which to supply the place of their heathen faith; and the unsatisfied cravings of a heart and mind thirsting for knowledge and truth, for light and peace, must have been to them the source of much grief and uneasiness. Must not they in such a case, when the gospel was preached to them, have hailed joyfully a doctrine which promised fully to satisfy all their heartfelt wants and desires, and which not only promised, but which actually did so? Think you not that all the wisdom of this world seemed to them folly, that they might become blessed through faith in Jesus Christ. Yes! let these half educated men glory in their supposed wisdom, let them despise the gospel and thrust it from them in unbelief, as we may see many in these times doing; but earnest and honest inquirers will, doubtless, be led to Christ, and find full satisfaction in his faith and peace, feeling, as they do, that the wise of this world can offer them nothing which can stay their yearnings. Guesses, uncertain opinions, paradoxes, these are all that human wisdom can give them, and doubts, far from being removed by these are strengthened. In faith on Christ and his precious gospel we find light and truth, peace and health, and happiness. Let him, therefore, who would be wise, learn to become a fool in the world's estimation, and turn to Him, who alone hath the words of eternal life. In him lie hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Let, then, lowly faith

in Him be our wisdom, and let the end and aim of all we do be to become more firm, more stable, more joyful, and, above all, more like in all things to our divine exemplar. Happy is every man who is converted to Christ, by what path soever the wisdom of God has conducted him! he has found a ground in which the anchor of his faith will ever hold firmly; he may join in the glad song,

Joy! I have found the Saviour
Who only can preserve.

Amen. Amen.

SERMON II.

CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

HAVING on the last Sunday, my brethren, reminded you of the various and manifold ways by which the wisdom and love of God leads men to faith on Christ, permit me on this day to commence that series of meditations which I have proposed to myself during the present season, the subject of which will be the life of Christians during the first ages of the Church. How the lives of the converts (by whatever path they may have been led to Christianity through their various peculiarities and modes of thought) were developed; how the faith which they now acknowledged manifested itself in them, and what influence the plastic and sanctifying power of the Gospel exerted upon the hearts and lives of its professors,—such considerations will, without doubt, prove to us an occupation as full of attraction as of wholesome instruction. It appears, however, needful, to the end that we may more easily conduct our contemplations, to bring them into a certain order, with which I must make you acquainted beforehand. Now, since every thing which presents itself to our attention in regard to the purpose before us relates to Christians, contemplated either as participators of a new religious society, or as members of a public community, or, lastly, as members of a family, it will be my endeavour to direct your thoughts, by degrees, to the life of Christians in the church, in the civil community, and in their families, during the earlier times of Christianity.

In order, however, that you may contemplate these early Christian times in the right point of view, I must commence by warning you, my brethren, not to expect

to find in the lives of Christians of those times only light without shade. Such an expectation were indeed far too bold. We must not dream of an ideal perfection, of a spotless purity, or a perfect undisturbed glory; we must look the reality in the face. In one, alone, was the spirit without measure, in Him who is the pattern to us all; but where among his truest and most devoted followers shall we find *one* who can be placed beside this pattern? In none hath all the brightness of the Godhead resided undimmed by any mixture; in none was the fulness of divinity, and there has been none among them who has not been compelled to exclaim, "I have not yet comprehended it, I am yet far from perfect." The early Christian church had its sides both of light and shade. Its beauty, its glory, and the fulness of the divine life which manifested itself in its bosom, will often compel our admiration, and inspire us with praises of the Lord. But neither must we suffer its shortcomings and its blemishes to remain hidden from us; we must not pass by the things which dimmed the brightness of its glory, that we may learn with shame and sorrow the power of sin which shews itself in every thing human, and often blights the most beautiful blossoms before they ripen into fruit. We shall thus most certainly escape the reproach of extolling the past at the expense of the present, and of exhibiting an untrue and distorted picture of the life of Christians during the early ages of the Church; whilst, at the same time, the conviction will force itself on us, that, in spite of its many and undeniable shortcomings and blemishes, the Christian life of those first centuries shines forth with overpowering beauty and brilliancy.

But before we pass on, my brethren, to a representation of the particular features of the Christian life, we must point to that which we have to consider as its peculiar foundation, the higher unity from which sprung its manifold relations and tendencies, and we must shew the grand and general points of distinction between it and the earlier modes of thought and life of those who were converted from Paganism or Judaism to the

faith. All the manifestations, how different soever of the faith in the relations of the life of Christians as members of the church, the state, or their families, had their common centre and peculiar foundation in the knowledge of God, which the Gospel aroused and continued in their hearts; and since this knowledge of God among the Christians was quite different from that of those who remained Pagans or Jews, it also imparted to their lives a quite different direction. A new tree having been planted, new fruits must have of necessity appeared. Let us pay our attention to-day to this circumstance, beseeching of God that he would be near us with his holy spirit.

TEXT. God is a Spirit; and they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.—St John, iv. 24.

In these equally simple and comprehensive words of the Saviour, we find the Christian knowledge of God expressed, as it was manifested among the professors of the Gospel, in contradistinction to that of the ante-Christian times as regards him, 1st, In his nature; 2d, In his workings; and to these two heads let us direct our attention.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. In consequence of the fall, the clear and pure knowledge of God in the heart of man was so utterly dimmed, darkened, and distorted, that falsehood acquired the power by degrees altogether to suppress the truth, and draw down the divinity itself into the bounds of human narrowness and vileness. For will and knowledge are most closely connected, and act and react on each other. When the will is directed to that which is sinful and godless, it converts truth into falsehood, that it may put a fair colour on its deeds; and where the light of knowledge is dimmed or darkened, there also is the will sold to the power of darkness and error,

delusion and sin go hand in hand. This, my brethren, must have been the sad experience of us all. As soon as a sinful will gains dominion over us, we seek to suppress the better knowledge which rises up against it, and we look around us for every kind of excuse and pretence to gloss and justify the evil; and the more that, led away by our sinful lusts, we thus weaken the power of the truth, and the deeper we sink into error, the more power do these ungodly lusts obtain, the more firmly do we become entangled in the meshes of sin. Because our works are evil we hate the light, and because we love darkness more than light, our works are evil, and our life is given over to the power of sin.

These remarks are intended to explain to us how man gradually fell from the primary, pure, and undimmed knowledge of God, into the horrible darkness of paganism, and into the falsehood of the most depraved idolatry. How great the corruptions were on this head among the most polished of the heathen nations of antiquity, St Paul witnesses to us, when he writes: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse; because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools: and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things; and changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever." We do, indeed, find among the sages of antiquity some nobler spirits who saw into the folly of idolatry (since, even in the pagan world, the spirit of God was never quite without a witness), but these either could not attain in their inquiries to any thing beyond dark uncer-

tain groping, guesses, and surmises, or else could not introduce this better knowledge into the consciousness and life of the people. They knew the lie, but they failed to discover the truth, and the multitudes sat "in darkness and the shadow of death," without a suspicion of their wretched and lamentable condition. Christianity alone brought light into this darkness; and it was its influence that exalted the deep indwelling conviction of the moral and spiritual nature of man concerning the existence and being of God into a clear consciousness of a one, living, invisible, and yet ever near and ever present Deity, filling all things with his power and energy, who had revealed himself to the world in Christ, who had reconciled it to himself and thus given it life; for, "this," saith the Redeemer, "is eternal life, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Christian knowledge of God is manifested, then, in the confession that "God is a spirit." If the heathen were unable to raise themselves to this knowledge of God, to feel, to acknowledge, and to find him the invisible and yet ever nigh and ever present Deity, who fills heaven and earth, the cause lay in the mighty power of sin, by which the capacity of beholding the Divine, and receiving heavenly truth, was dimmed and weakened. Thus beautifully and strikingly the Bishop of Antioch, Theophilus (A. D. 170), expresses himself in answer to the question of the sensuous heathen, "Where is thy God?" "It is He," he replied, "whose breath gives life to all things. If He withdraw his breath, they return into nothingness. Thou canst not speak without bearing witness to Him. The very breath of thy life witnesses of him, and knowest thou Him not? This thou hast because of the blindness of thy soul, and the dullness of thy heart. God is seen by those who can see him, while they have the eyes of their spirits open. You, indeed, have eyes, but the eyes of some are darkened and cannot see the sunlight. Since, then, although the blind cannot behold the sun, the sun does not therefore cease to be, but the blind must attribute the fault

to themselves and their darkened eyes ; so, O man, are the eyes of thy soul darkened by thy sins and evil deeds. Man must have his soul pure like a mirror ; and as, if the mirror be dim, man's countenance cannot be seen in it, so man cannot see God if sin reign within him. But thou canst be made whole if thou wilt. Trust thyself to the physician and he will open the eyes of thy soul. Who is the physician ? It is the God who makes thee whole and living by His word." St Paul also tells us, that man, through his estrangement from the life which is of God, and the inward corruption of his heart, is unable to behold the light of divine truth, and comprehend the manifestation of God ; whence it follows, that true and clear knowledge of God can proceed only from an inward conversion and regeneration by the spirit.

It is pleasing, too, to see how the preachers of the gospel, in order to arouse in men's minds this knowledge of God, used to appeal to those dim feelings and surmises, and scanty traces of a better knowledge, which were here and there to be found among the heathen. Thus did the apostle Paul. He had found in Athens an altar with the inscription, " To the unknown God." He instantly made use of this circumstance, and addressed thus the assembled people : " Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands : neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things ; and hath made of one blood, all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation : that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us ; for in him we live, and move, and have our being ; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring. Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think

that the godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." Thus, we see here how Paul, making his starting point the dim knowledge of God among the heathen, preaches to them the Almighty Creator, the one primary author and fountain of being, who, being a spirit, works according to his nature everywhere with like power, who is in like manner nigh unto all, and to be found of all that seek him, because in him all live, and move, and have their being.

In later times, also, when Christianity had already spread far and wide, the teachers of the church made use in their sermons of the poor remnant of the knowledge of God among the heathen, in order to lead back the wanderers to the light of truth, that they might acknowledge that "God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." Tertullian, especially, who lived at the end of the second and beginning of the third century, used to pay particular attention to the natural and at the same time unpremeditated expressions of the uneducated simple people, in order to prove how even the dominion of error and heathen superstition had not been able entirely to blot out in their souls every trace of the original knowledge of God. "I address thee," says he, "O soul, who art not trained in books and schools, and full of human wisdom, but who art simple and ignorant; to thee I appeal, as thou appearest among the humble and lowly in the market and the workshop. We hear *thee* exclaim, what is not permitted to *us*, in the house and out of it, "what God gives," "if God permit." But through these expressions thou bearest witness to the being of a God, ascribest to him all power, and lookest to his will. What we say, also, of the nature of our God is not hidden from thee. Thou sayest, "the good God," "God gives the good:" thou addest thereunto, "but man is evil." Thus, through this opposition, thou declarest that man is bad, because he hath withdrawn from the good God. We agree also in that which we hold to be the holiest foundation of doctrine and life,

in the belief that God alone is the original source of good to man. Thou sayest as readily as we Christians do, "God bless thee;" "God sees all;" "I commit it to God;" "God will requite it;" "God judge between me and thee." Whence such modes of speech among those who are not Christians? Whence such maxims of heathens, even whilst propitiating their false gods? They spring from the innate knowledge of God: they are the language of our original nature; they are the witnesses of the soul, which is by nature Christian. And, while the soul speaks thus, she gazes up to heaven, as knowing that it is the throne of the living God, and that from him and from heaven she is sprung. Although confined in the prison of the body—although held in captivity by error—although weakened by lusts and desires—although a slave of false gods: yet, if she awakes as out of a trance, as out of a slumber, if she recovers her senses as after a delirious illness, and attains again to a feeling of health, she names God by that name alone which is peculiar to the true deity.

Among the Jews, indeed, this knowledge of God was not so depressed, so subjugated by the power of delusion, as among the heathen. They, on the contrary, acknowledged the one true living God, who had chosen them out of all nations as his peculiar people, had honoured them with his especial revelations, and had spoken to them "at sundry times and in divers places by the prophets;" and the holy records of the Old Testament are witnesses what a noble knowledge of God, what worthy worship of him, were to be found among the more exalted of this people. But with the great mass, this worship of the one true living God had become an empty form, a thing wrapt in externals, and dead, and therefore, of necessity, exerting no hallowing influence upon men's lives. Their adoration of God was no adoration in spirit and in truth, but an external and sensuous worship, bound to time and space, and consisting in a punctual observance of idle rites and usages. And on this account must Christianity, striving as it did to exalt every thing from the carnal into the spiri-

tual, have come into the most direct opposition with Judaism and its then existing knowledge of God. How our Lord himself contended against it, we see from the discourse which he held with the woman of Samaria. To her remark, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship," his reply was, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." From these words it is clear, that, neither among the Jews nor the Samaritans had the knowledge of God remained pure and undefiled. Though their worship could not be called a false one, yet was it far from answering fully to the nature of God; for God is a spirit, and therefore exalted above time and space, and, on this account, he must be worshipped peculiarly in spirit; that is, not in a manner external, and belonging to the senses, but in an internal, spiritual manner. But as in Christ first the fulness of the divine Spirit hath been revealed to men, and shed abroad in their hearts, so can true knowledge and worship of God exist only where his Spirit dwells in the heart, and and where men, through faith in Him, have appropriated to themselves the truth, which He is. He who has the spirit of Christ, hath therewith the true knowledge of God: he feels himself inwardly connected with and united to God—God is in him, and he in God; and, by this knowledge of God alone is right worship of him possible. To this our Lord wished to lead the Jews by his gospel, and therefore he proclaimed, "God is a spirit, and they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." On this account, too, he exclaimed to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up again;" which words, as recorded

by St John, are, by some commentators, particularly referred to the conclusion of the sensuous worship of God of the Old Testament, and the introduction of a new and spiritual religion, sealed by the resurrection of Christ. To this new order of things Stephen undoubtedly alluded, when he was accused of having said, with relation to the temple, "Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered us." And, with what earnestness St Paul insisted on such a worship, in spirit and in truth, his own words testify: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Yet, while Christianity exalted its professors to a true knowledge of God, through the information which it gave them concerning His nature, and while it insisted on a worship, spiritual, answering to His nature, removed from all external pomp of the senses, it was still calculated to penetrate all the existing relations of society without destroying them. It ennobled them all by the spirit which it communicated, and therefore, contrary to all other ancient forms of worship, which were only those of nations or states, was enabled to become a universal religion, and to unite all nations into one body, filled with the same spirit. This, especially, it was, that was so startling and incomprehensible to the heathen, and on this account chiefly they opposed Christianity, because it refused to pander to the sensuality of men. "See," said the above-mentioned antagonist of the Christians, Celsus, "see, how different your religion is from all which men have before this been used to call religion. No temples, no altars, no images, no sacrifices. How is such a religion, which offers nothing to the senses, fitted for men living in a world of sense?" This was indeed a riddle to the blinded heathen, but in this was manifested the peculiar character of the Christian faith. This faith holds to the things which are above the senses, the divine, the eternal, for it rests upon the truth, that "God is

a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

II. Let us now see how this Christian knowledge of God for the most part was expressed in life. We might have expected, that, in this relation also, the contrast with every thing preceeding it would be striking; for where the spirit of the Lord is, there are men renewed in thought and heart and life—there are the words of the apostle fulfilled "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." And this, in fact, we find to have been the case, particularly in the earlier times of the Church. As the knowledge of Christians was a spiritual one, so also we find their life to have been spiritual, and their watchword was, "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Paganism could not be otherwise than coupled with the greatest moral corruption; and to this corruption St Paul alludes, when he says: "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;" to which he adds a description of the deep moral degradation and corruption of heathendom, whose truth we could the less doubt, as heathen writers themselves confirm it by their judgments, and as the same things appear at the present day in the heathen world. And how often does St Paul in his epistles contrast the early condition of the converts to Christianity, with the change effected in their lives by the power of the gospel! "You were," he writes to the Ephesians, "sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." "Such were some of you," he reminds the Corinthians, after reciting a long catalogue of heathen sins, "but," he adds, "ye are washed, ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God." In fact, wherever the gospel was received in faith, its divine power wrought out a new life; and nowhere does this new life appear more beautiful and more noble than among the

Christians of the first centuries. They could, indeed, with justice say of themselves, "in him we live, and move, and have our being." Externally indeed they appeared the same as before, but what a change had passed within them! The spirit of God which impelled them, made their life a truly heavenly one. In an epistle of very early date, this is thus generally described: "The Christians are separated from the rest of men neither in their abode nor their language, nor their manners; but although they dwell among them, and are distinguished neither in food nor clothes, nor any of the external forms of society, yet are they marked out by a wonderful and striking mode of life. They inhabit their native land, yet are as strangers; they take part in every thing as citizens, they suffer every thing as strangers. A strange land is to them a native land, and their native land a strange one. They marry as others do; they beget children, but do not expose them (as the heathen frequently did.) They live in the flesh, but not according to the flesh. They dwell on earth, but their walk is in heaven. They obey existing laws, but by their lives they raise themselves above all laws. They love all men, yet are persecuted, rejected, and condemned by all. They are slain, and pass through death into life. They are poor and make many rich, they have need and yet superfluity of all things. They are reviled, but they bless. In a word, as the soul is in the body, so are Christians in the world. As the soul extends through all the members of the body, so are Christians spread through all cities of the earth. The soul dwells indeed in the body, but is not corporeal, and Christians in like manner dwell in the world, but are not worldly, and their worship of God is as of an invisible being. The flesh hates and opposes the spirit, though the spirit has done it no wrong, because it forbids it to yield itself to its lusts. In like manner the world hates Christians, although they have done it no wrong, because they oppose themselves to the lusts of the world. The spirit loves the flesh that hates it, and Christians love those by whom they are hated. The soul

is enclosed in the body, and yet is that which upholds it, and thus are Christians in the world, detained as it were at a post, and yet they are they who preserve the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal body, and Christians dwell as strangers in that which passeth away, and await the life that passeth not away in heaven. So important a post has God committed to them, which they dare not desert." Justin Martyr, in the second century, thus writes of the life of Christians: "We who once served pleasure, now strive after purity; we who used magical arts, have dedicated ourselves to the good and eternal God. We who loved gain more than any other thing, now share what we possess with all men, and give to all that need. We who once hated and persecuted each other, and received not strangers into our houses, now love them without hesitation: we pray for our enemies, and seek to convince them that hate us without a cause, in order that they may live after the glorious teaching of Christ, and thereby receive the joyful hope of attaining to the same good things as the Almighty God has given us."

Origen writes: "The work of Jesus is manifested among all men, where communities founded by Christ exist, having been converted from a thousand sins; and even yet the name of Jesus introduces gentleness, order, love toward men, goodness and mildness among those who do not hypocritically profess belief on the teaching of God and on Christ, and the judgment to come, for the sake of earthly profit and advantage, but who receive him in all uprightness."

And must not we say the same thing still of our times, my brethren? Wherever men have arrived at a knowledge of the truth, and knitted themselves to Christ Jesus in faith, they cease to live after the world and sin, and such a contrast appears between their present and former condition, as there was between Christians and heathens, for the change is no other than that from the old to the new man, of which Origen says, with relation to his own times: "The communities of

Christians are, compared to the communities among which they live, as lights in the world."

Enough, my brethren, of the general life of Christians in the first centuries. You see that a new mind and spirit were implanted among men by the Gospel, and the life of those who acknowledged Jesus Christ was a surrender of themselves to God—a life consisting in following Him who has left us a pattern, that we should tread in his steps, and who has proclaimed to us in his word: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." And thus the adoration of Christians was an adoration in spirit and in truth. They glorified and praised God by their lives in his spirit. May this excite us to imitate them. May His spirit dwell in all of us, "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;" and may it be said of all of us with truth, that in God "we live, and move, and have our being." Thereunto may his mercy help us. Amen.

SERMON III.

THE LIFE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS A LIFE OF LOVE.

IN discoursing of the religious life of the Christian churchman of the first centuries, and in directing our attention to this, in particular, as we have determined to do in the considerations which we have now commenced, there are two points which have a claim on our especial notice. Before all things, we must fix our eyes on the individual developments of piety, the individual fruits of God's Holy Spirit, shed abroad on the hearts of the faithful, as they manifested themselves in their lives. We did, indeed, in our last meditation, depict, in rough and general outline, the life of the early Christians, as the working of that new knowledge of God stirred up within them by the power of the Gospel, exhibiting itself in the "worshipping of God in spirit and in truth,"—in directing the soul to things above the senses, and eternal,—in a full surrender of all the faculties to the Divine and Invisible,—in the true following of Christ Jesus,—in earnest striving after that holiness which is pleasing unto God, so that it stood in the most decided contrast with men's former life under Judaism or Paganism, and bore the same relation to it as the new man does to the old man, of whom St Paul says, that he is "corrupt according to deceitful lusts." But it is not enough to place before our eyes only this general picture of the lives of early Christians, we must also contemplate its individual traits; we must attend to its individual beauties; we must consider the individual virtues of those men, by which they proved themselves, in their early pilgrimage, the disciples and followers of Him "who had called them out of darkness

into his own marvellous light ;” and with this topic we will commence.

But there is yet another aspect of the religious life of members of the church, which we must not overlook. This refers especially to the open confession of the faith, and will lead us to consider the form of religious worship as it originally existed in the church ; and thus Christian culture, the life of churchmen, taken in its more confined sense, the open and general worship of God, will claim its share of our attention. If the spirit of God dwelleth in us, our modes of thought and lives will necessarily be formed upon a Christian model ; that is, will be a faithful copy in all their relations and circumstances of the mind and life of Christ, and we shall be able to say with the apostle, “ we have the mind of Christ, our walk is in Heaven.” This we call the religious life. But this is not the only office of the Holy Spirit ; he forms at the same time a society, so that the professors of the same faith look on each other as fellow members of one body, to which all belong, and thereby all are led to feel the necessity of proclaiming their belief together, of worshipping together their God and Saviour, and of edifying themselves by pious exercises, by prayer, by reading, and meditation on God’s holy word, by the celebration of the sacraments, by doing in all things as the Scripture enjoins : “ Build up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, and keep yourselves in the love of God.” Thus will the religious life become a life of church society and union. Our life in the church is exhibited in our assemblies and our services, and it cannot therefore but be gratifying to us to know how Christians, in primitive ages, ordered and regulated their lives as members of the church. And if in our first view we do truly contemplate the communion of saints, when we consider Christians as members of one invisible kingdom, as the society of true believers, of men enlightened and sanctified by God’s Holy Spirit, in this part of our subject we have to do especially with the *visible* church, that is, the assembly of those who, through baptism in the

name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, have outwardly acknowledged Christ; and we do not look so much to the hearts and lives of those Christians, as to the manner in which they publicly professed their faith, and the peculiar forms of divine service by which they were externally united.

We shall now consider the life of the early Christians, as one worked upon and sanctified by the spirit of God, while we exhibit the individual expressions and manifestations of a pious and believing spirit. In this part of our subject we shall have occasion to speak of the fruits of that spirit which inspired the first Christians, their love, their humility, their long suffering, their self-denial, their zeal in prayer, their firmness and constancy in the truth. We shall thus have presented to us the most prominent traits of early Christian character, and this will afford us a good opportunity for self-examination, while it cannot fail to stir up and encourage us. We cannot for a moment doubt what feature to commence with. Is not love the "bond of perfectness," and does it not contain all virtues in itself? Does not the apostle exhort us: "Be ye followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and has given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God." This, then, shall be the object of our meditation this day. The life of the early Christians especially presents itself to us as a life in love, and to this we will at this time direct our attention. And first, let us, each of us, beseech God's blessing in silent prayer.

TEXT. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.—St John's Gospel, xiii. 34, 35.

A new commandment, my brethren, indeed, was this, at a time when all the world was wrapped up in cold and heartless selfishness! What a contrast in those

early ages of our church must that spirit of self have exhibited to this loving spirit by which Christians proved themselves the disciples of Him who proclaimed to us the love of God,—who in his own life and deeds gave the most touching pattern of purest and holiest love,—who, through love of us, suffered death upon the cross to rescue and bring salvation to us! Let us, then, consider how this spirit of love was manifested in the first times of the church; and may these thoughts awaken and encourage all of us to love one another, even as Christ hath loved us.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

How earnestly and impressively our divine Redeemer continually urged on his followers the necessity of pure, open, heartfelt and active love, is sufficiently shown by the almost unvarying tenor of his discourses, in which he, as in the words of our text, laid down love—inward, self-sacrificing, brotherly love—as the peculiar mark of his disciples. His apostles trod in his footsteps. Not only did they walk, as he had led the way, in love, but they depicted it in their sermons and their writings as the highest and most excellent part of Christianity—as the royal law, the fulfilment of the law—as that which never faileth—as the condition of all salvation—as that which comprehends every blessing. No reader of the Bible can be ignorant of this. Would that this love, everywhere so praised and commended as the most necessary and precious of gifts, were indeed found exhibited in men's lives. But alas! every one agrees with the declaration of our Lord, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another;" and yet how often we miss this spirit of love among us,—how often have we to bewail this want of true brotherly love! Wherefore, we should be the more eager to mark how rich in love the life of these first Christians was, that we may warm our cold hearts

at their flame. The apostolic history tells the praises of the first Christian community which was formed after the outpouring of the Holy Ghost in Jerusalem: "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul; neither said any of them, that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. They sold their lands and houses, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." What name can we give to that divine power which united into one family them that acknowledged the Lord—which made them all brothers and sisters—which inspired and urged them to sacrifice all their earthly possessions, that none might suffer want? O my brethren, it was none other than love that effected this Christian union. It was in love that they were all one heart and one soul; and this love was no flighty emotion, passing rapidly away, no wildfire flaming for a moment, and then sinking into darkness, but it was a flame constantly extending itself, daily kindling more hearts, and daily burning more brightly in the first ages of the church. Even the heathens were struck and astonished at this love, with which the disciples of the Lord loved one another. They could not understand how men of the most various lands, ranks, relations, and degrees of education, should love each other so heartily and really. "Behold," they exclaimed in astonishment, "how these Christians love one another, and how ready they are to die for each other." Had they but known the foundation of this love, they would not have so much wondered at its manifestation. The common faith in one Saviour, the common love to one Redeemer, to whom all owed their hope and salvation, must have indeed been calculated to unite all, however distinct and disunited before, into one holy bond of brotherhood. From their union with the Lord a participation in His divine mind and life must have proceeded, and His spirit, the spirit of love, must ever have penetrated their whole being, and have sanctified their lives. "As the dry ground," says Irenæus, "unless it be moistened, brings

forth no fruit, so could we, who were before a dry stock, bring forth no fruits of a holy life, without dew from above; but, through the Holy Spirit, the form and stamp of the Father and the Son are communicated to us." "Men," says the same father, "should ever be grateful to God, as feeling in themselves from what misery they are rescued, and, after they have received from him the gift of the life that passeth not away, should love him more abundantly, since he to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much." And another teacher of the early church, after having discoursed of the grace of redemption, says: "What joy must fill thee when thou knowest this, and how shouldst thou love Him who first so loved thee? But if thou lovest him, thou shouldst be an imitator of his love. And how can man imitate God? If he takes on himself his neighbour's burden—if he seeks to do good—if he imparts to the needy the gifts he has received from God, and thus becomes to the receiver like God,—such an one is an imitator of God."

From this fellowship with the Lord, from this faith in his unspeakable love, from hearty thankfulness for the eternal blessings of this love, arose that love among Christians, at which the cold, faithless, selfish heathen were so much astonished, which they beheld with so much suspicion, because in it they dreaded to discover plots and purposes dangerous to the state. They thought that the followers of the Crucified must have formed a secret society, and have secret signs and watchwords one with another. Their custom was to call themselves brothers and sisters, because they were wont to consider themselves as fellow members of one heavenly family. When any one was admitted into the community, all who were present gave him the kiss of brotherhood, with which they used also to greet each other at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. And this was doubtless no empty form with the majority of them, as it unhappily so often is with us, but it was the faithful expression of the love which filled their souls, and a mark of the inward relation-

ship which they felt that they bore one to another. They considered themselves always as brethren in life, and therefore had an affectionate care for the wants of each individual member. Christian strangers turned at once, wherever they came, to the heads of the Christian community, and the unknown were received as known, and found among the brotherhood spiritual and bodily refreshment. But that this brotherly love might not be abused by deceivers, they required of Christian strangers to produce testimonials and letters of recommendation from their bishops, as proofs that they were sincere members of the Christian church. These testimonials secured them every where the most fraternal sympathy and support. Tertullian vindicates this brotherly communion in love to the astonished heathens, saying: "We, too, are your brethren, through our common mother, our common nature, although you, like unkind brethren, deny our common nature. With how much more right ought those to consider each other as brethren who acknowledge God, their father, who have received the one Spirit of sanctification, who have come out of one and the same darkness into one and the same light of truth? We who are one heart and one soul, can find it no matter of deliberation to have our earthly goods in common one with another."

This spirit of love was also expressed among the first Christians in their common love-feasts, which they called *Agapæ*, in which Christians of all ranks, forgetting every distinction, took part. In these the rich willingly imparted of their abundance to the poor. Tertullian thus describes these love-feasts, as they were at the end of the second century: "We sit not down at our tables till we have first offered up prayer to God. We eat only so much as will satisfy each man's hunger: we drink only so much as will not disturb a modest demeanour. We satisfy ourselves so as to be mindful of the prayers to be offered during the approaching night. We converse as those who forget not that God hears them. When we have washed and lighted candles, each one of us is required to bring for-

ward something to the praise of God, either taken from the Holy Scriptures, or suggested by his own mind. Our feast is concluded with prayer." In the Acts of the Apostles this love-feast is already mentioned, to which was added daily in the early Christian communities the celebration of the holy Lord's Supper. "They broke bread," says the narrative, "from house to house, and did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God." The apostle Paul blames and rebukes the Corinthians, in his first epistle, for many disorders and abuses which had crept into the church there in the celebration of the love-feasts connected with the Lord's Supper; and such disorders, which, as the Christian church increased, became inevitable, were probably the reason why the Agapæ were severed from the Lord's Supper, and at last wholly discontinued. They still remain, although in a completely altered form, in that little Christian community which we all know under the name of the Moravian Brethren.

Seeing, then, as we do, from the circumstances which we have just mentioned, that these love-feasts were not celebrated by all Christians with a right and pure intention, we may not conceal from ourselves and our hearers the fact, that the custom which we have before noticed of greeting one another with the name and kiss of brotherhood, was here and there abused by unworthy men,—and what wonder if it was! Many had not the spirit, and these were contented with the empty form and gesture, as is so frequently the case among us also; for the holiest thing is often desecrated by unholy men, who think that to be called a Christian is enough, without possessing a Christian spirit, and that the form is indeed the essence. Of this Clement of Alexandria complains at the commencement of the third century, that many made a wanton use of the kiss of brotherhood, and thus threw a stumbling block in the way of the heathen. On this subject he says: "Love is not valued according to the kiss of brotherhood, but according to the goodness of the will. But there are many who,

without love in their hearts, only create confusion in the community by the kiss of brotherhood. And this has spread abroad evil suspicion and accusations, as though we gave the kiss of brotherhood publicly, and in a manner void of shame. Yet even the greetings of those who are dear to us when given in the streets, in order that the heathen may behold, are not of the smallest worth. For if it be right to pray to God in the closet and in secret, it follows that we can shew our love to our neighbours in secret, and in heart, whilst yet we conform to the times, for we are the salt of the earth." Would we might learn from this how useless, nay how sinful it is, to make a mere show of Christian practices, and how little there is in the outward form, as compared with the love of the heart; "for the kingdom of God is not in words, but in power."

But more especially did the early Christians exhibit their love to the stranger, the poor, the sick, the old, the fatherless, and the widow, as well as to those who were in captivity for the faith's sake. The whole community considered it a sacred duty to contribute to their maintenance and support, and, to this end, free-will offerings were made at their meetings for divine service, as among us what we call "collections," are made for the same purpose. We are told as early as in the Acts of the Apostles, that men were chosen from the congregation to distribute the alms to the poor and the widow; and we see from the epistles of St Paul, that there were many zealous collections of freewill offerings of love for the support of persecuted Christians. On such occasions, the different communities were generous rivals in love, and each brought willingly out of his abundance, as far as he had in his power. Men gave not slowly and grudgingly, as they do so often in our times; for they knew the word of their God, "to give is more blessed than to receive," and "God loveth a cheerful giver." In particular, it was the duty of Christian women to visit the sick, to care for the sup-

port of the needy, and the dividing of alms to the poor, which deserves the more to be noticed by us, as it was quite unknown to the heathen.

When, however, an extraordinary occasion presented itself, the bishops used to appoint extraordinary collections, and in order that the poor might be enabled to shew forth their love actively, fast-days were appointed, that they might contribute what was spared from that day's expenditure to the relief of the needy. Nor did these communities content themselves with providing for the poor among themselves, but were ever ready to relieve distant and oppressed churches. In this way the rich community at Rome sent supplies of money, in particular, to those who, in the most distant regions, were persecuted and led captive for the faith's sake. Many Christians in Numidia and Northern Africa were, towards the middle of the third century, taken captive by the neighbouring barbarian hordes. The Numidian churches being too poor to pay their ransom, applied in their distress to Carthage, and Cyprian, bishop of that place, immediately collected a large sum, which he sent to the Numidian bishops, accompanied by these words: "Who would not feel pain in such cases, or fail to consider his brother's sorrows as his own, when St Paul says, 'if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.' Wherefore we must now consider the captivity of our brethren as our own, and love must urge us to ransom those with whom we are bound up in one body. For, as the apostle says, 'know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the spirit of God dwelleth in you:' we must (even if love were not a sufficient inducement to aid our brethren) deeply consider that the temples of God are in captivity, and we dare not, through our delay, incur the guilt of their remaining so any longer. And when the same apostle says, 'as many of you as are baptised have put on Christ,' we are bound to see Christ in each of our captive brethren, that Christ, who saved us from the danger of death, and the jaws of Satan, and we must ransom him for a petty sum of money, who ransomed us by his blood and death upon

the cross, and who now permits this distress to come on us that our faith may be tried, whether each of us will do that for the other, which he would wish to be done for himself, if he were in captivity among barbarians. We do indeed wish that this may not occur again, but should God permit it once more, to prove the love and faith of our hearts, do not hesitate to announce it to us, that ye may be fully persuaded that our whole community pours forth its prayers to God, that he would prevent a like misfortune, but that they would also help joyfully and abundantly if the occasion should return."

How beautifully does this letter express the sympathies of Christian love—and, God be thanked for it, such sympathies still live in many a Christian bosom. The societies of Berlin are also not unknown in the annals of benevolence; for when last year, and once before that time, frightful pestilence raged among us, and when during this year the inundations cast our brethren around into indescribable misery and distress, O then, nobly, most nobly, was the spirit of comforting, helping, saving love, made manifest among us. Rich and poor vied with each other in bringing gifts willingly and cheerfully. But yet we must never forget that it is not every act of benevolence that is Christian. That alone is Christian which proceeds from hearty love and gratitude to our Redeemer, from upright good will to those whom He hath redeemed with us, and from the real impulses of the heart. But men too often wish through their works of love to gain some merit before God; they are often only the fruits of a refined selfishness, food for vanity, props of a corrupt and sinful nature. Frequently they are even held up for a spectacle, and become merely an idle pomp paraded before the eyes of men. Then, indeed, do the most glittering deeds and works of love lose the stamp of Christianity, and, in this spirit, a man may give all his goods to the poor, and it shall profit him nothing, for then it is not truly love, but self-righteousness, high-mindedness, pride, vanity, selfishness, that impel him. Thus

was it with the Pharisees, of whom our Lord says, "they have their reward." Thus was it with Ananias and his wife Sapphira, to whom St Peter announced the judgment of the holy God, because they, with their false, hypocritical love, lied to the holy Ghost. Thus is it with but too many in our days, who are benevolent only to minister to the old man and his lusts. And beside these, how many are there also, who, without any regard to the duty of doing good, and of love to all men, yet think themselves good Christians ! Even in the first centuries there were some whose hearts had grown cold, and who needed earnestly to be exhorted to the duty of love. Thus speaks Cyprian to the mother of a family, who, when called upon for an act of benevolence, excused herself on the score of her numerous children : " Seek for thy children a father other than their mortal and feeble parent, Him, namely, who is an eternal and almighty Father of spiritual children. Let him be the guardian and protector of thy children. Let him guard them against all the injustice of the world. Thou, in that thou lookest more to an earthly than an heavenly inheritance, and seekest to commend thy children rather to Satan than to Christ, thou committest a double sin, inasmuch as thou preparest not for thy children a heavenly father, and teachest them to love earthly goods more than Christ."

But such dimmings of the pure spirit of love among Christians of the earliest times were rather exceptions and peculiarities, and the spirit of love beamed with overpowering brilliancy over the churches of the faithful. The resignation, the courage, the self-sacrificing power of Christian brotherly love stood in strong contrast with heathenish selfishness, cowardice, and want of feeling for public calamities. Hear Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, on this subject in the middle of the third century. A raging pestilence devastated the town. On this occasion he writes thus : " That pestilence appeared to the heathens most fearful and terrible, but not so to us, for we looked on it as a trial and exercise of our faith. Most of our brethren, in the fulness of

their brotherly love, did not spare themselves, they cared only one for another, and as, without caring for themselves, they tended the sick for Christ's sake, they often gave up the ghost together with those whom they came to aid. Many, too, perished themselves, after having by their unwearied care saved others. The best among the brethren closed their lives in this manner; so that a death like this, which was the fruit of great piety and strong faith, seemed to fall nothing short of martyrdom. Many who closed the mouths and eyes of dying Christians, who bore their bodies on their shoulders, embraced them, washed them, and wrapped them in their grave-clothes, soon followed them to the tomb. Far otherwise was it with the heathen. They thrust from them the sick, fled away from those who were dearest to them, cast them half dead into the streets, left the corpses unburied, to escape the infection, which yet, with all their fear and care, they could not easily avoid." The same love adorned the Christians of Carthage when a pestilence made great ravages in Northern Africa. The heathens lost all courage and self-possession, left through cowardice the sick and the dying, and the streets were filled with bodies which none ventured to remove. Covetousness alone overcame fear, and there were many miserable wretches who made a profit of the general misery, and enriched themselves by it. There were many who accused the Christians as the causes of this suffering, as being enemies of the gods, instead of being led by it to acknowledge and confess their sins. Bishop Cyprian exhorted his flock to see nothing in this pestilence but a trial of their faith and love. "How necessary is it," such are his words, "that this pestilence, attended as it is by death and misery, should prove the thoughts of men, whether the whole will serve the sick, whether relations truly love each other, whether masters will pity their sick servants." But it was not enough that Christians should show the kindest love one to another, the heathen also, who reviled and persecuted them, were to have a share in the blessings of their love. Cyprian collected his flock, and thus ex-

horted them : “ If we do good only to those who are ours, what do we more than the publicans and heathens ! But if we are the children of that God who causes the sun to shine, and the rain to fall, on both the just and the unjust, who extends his blessings not only to those who are his, but also to those who are far from him in their thoughts, we must show it in our deeds, by striving to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven, by blessing those who curse us, and doing good to those who persecute us.” And his admonitions were not unheeded. Rich and poor quickly put their hands to the work, to give aid in the general need, and it was to be ascribed to the active love of the Christians that the pestilence did not spread farther, and cause still deeper misery.

Thus, my brethren, did the spirit of love work in those days in the church of God. Thus zealous were the Christians of all ranks and places to fulfil the command of Jesus Christ, and to prove themselves his disciples by the most hearty brotherly love. What can I add to the instances I have adduced ? “ Go ye,” I add, “ go ye, and do likewise.” Walk in love ! It is the fairest fruit, the surest proof of faith. There is no faith where there is no love, where men are not inspired with love of their brethren, where they do not comfort, help, do good to, bless, and even requite with good, the evil of slanderers and persecutors. And “ he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen.” Wherefore let this example of the early Christians rouse us to emulation, that we may love and bless, and do good, and faint not, from heartfelt gratitude to Him who “ hath loved us even unto death,” and to make us eternally happy, and let us, none of us, forget what he hath said : “ Verily, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Amen.

SERMON IV.

THE ZEAL IN PRAYER OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

LET the words of my lips, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

At our last meeting, my brethren, we considered the life of Christians, in the first ages of the church, as a life in love. They were so penetrated with love one for another, that the selfish heathens could not sufficiently wonder at it, and they did not confine their manifestations of it to the brethren, they had been taught to bless, and to do good, even to their enemies and persecutors.¹ And thus it was clear that the Spirit of the Lord dwelt in them, that Christ was their life, that they had received into their hearts the declaration of our divine Redeemer, "Hereby will all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." And this love was the necessary fruit of their belief in the gospel. For, by the light of the gospel, they knew the unsearchable riches of the love, the grace, and mercy of God and Jesus Christ, and then no other result could have followed; they must have been inspired with heartfelt gratitude to the Lord,—they must have dedicated their whole hearts and lives to him in love,—they must have called one to another, with St John: "Let us love one another, for he first loved us!" And how could this love to God and their Redeemer be better exhibited: how more clearly and more nobly than by the most sincere and heartfelt love for their brethren? It has always been found thus among believers, my brethren. Where faith in the Redeemer, to whom we owe all sal-

vation and blessedness, is strong and living in the heart, its fairest fruit, love, is sure to be its reflection in the walk of the disciple ; and this love is the surest and least deceptive mark of their communion with the Lord ; is the incontrovertible proof, " that they have passed from death into life."

But love is a fire which must soon become extinct in the heart if it be not fed and supported with the utmost care, for there is, indeed, much in the world by which it is damped. We all know too well, from our own and often frequent experience, how much ingratitude and wickedness are to be found among men ; and no answer is more frequent, when men are called on to love and do good, than this : " He is not worth it, he does not deserve one's doing him any good." Especially difficult is it to fulfil the command, " love your enemies ;" and we see, alas, too often how ill it is fulfilled by those who pride themselves on being Christians. Verily, it is not nature, it is grace, if we walk constant in love, and are not wearied or caused to wander by aught,—and it is for this grace we must continually ask of him, " who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." As, then, love has its root in faith, so is it supported, strengthened, and nourished by prayer, which we must never fail to consider the soul of the whole Christian life. Where men do not pray, or do not pray aright, the inward life can never prosper, as little as a plant can prosper and grow in a hard dry soil, where it has no nourishment. As a lamp which has no oil to support the flame must be extinguished, so must the holy fire of faith and love be extinguished in the heart, if it do not continually receive new nourishment from prayer.

We shall see that the early Christians were deeply impressed and penetrated with this truth, and therefore prayer was the element in which they lived. In this, then, let us take them, my brethren, as our pattern and example. For what reason can there be that so little working and living faith is found in Christian churches of these days, that love daily waxes colder in men's

hearts, that a Christian life rarely appears in all its freshness and purity among us ; to what can we ascribe this, but to the fact, that men are so lamentably deficient in zeal in prayer, that they are so indifferent about church and family edification, for God requires to be asked before he will give ; he demands that we should cry unto him if we would live, and through him mightily prevail over our sins, over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Our purpose this day, my brethren, shall be to urge each other on to the practice of so holy a duty, while we direct our attention to the Christians of earlier times, and remember their zeal in prayer ; and may the Lord bless us in this our task. Amen.

TEXT. Pray without ceasing.—1 Thess. v. 17.

This, my brethren, is a short exhortation, but one of the utmost importance, and worthy to be laid to the hearts of all of you. It will encourage us, and urge us onward, to see how conscientiously the early Christians fulfilled this duty. The zeal in prayer of the Christians of the first centuries shall therefore be the subject of this day's meditations, and we may divide our subject into two heads, shewing,

1st, How they understood the apostolic exhortation.

2d, What blessed effects they ascribed to prayer.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth ; thy word is truth.

I. What prayer really is, numberless Christians are far from rightly understanding ; and therefore the command of the apostle, " Pray without ceasing," seems to them strange and foolish. " How can we do so ?" is their constant demand. " Who can always pray ? Have we nothing else to do ? Our occupations and calling demand the greatest portion of our time, and we need also now and then rest and refreshment, that we may gather new strength to work cheerfully in our vocation and duty. How, then, can it be required of us to pray without ceasing ? Is it not enough that we pray at

stated times and seasons, that we make our morning and evening petitions, and on Sundays attend the appointed service of God in the Church?" This is, indeed, strange language, manifesting great ignorance of Christian matters, and which no real Christian could hold; for he knows that the apostolic injunction, "Pray without ceasing," demands something far different from standing and pronouncing prayers with the lips, or reading from books, or even uttering them from the heart. The expression "prayer," means rather in holy scripture that especial, constant, uninterrupted direction of the soul to that which is heavenly, and above the senses, the lifting up of the heart to that which is invisible and eternal, the inward life with Christ in God, the deep living knowledge of God accompanying us everywhere; "for in him we live and move, and have our being." And this is still the peculiarity of the true Christian, that thoughts of God never leave him; that he "has God always before his eyes, and in his heart;" that he has the eye of his soul steadily fixed on him in all his works, in all his pleasures, his joys, his conflicts, his sufferings. God is everywhere with him; in every place he feels his hallowing presence; "The Father leaveth me not alone," he exclaims with his Redeemer, and therefore is his desire always with him. Nothing can interrupt his communion with God; and it is to this ever-during communion with God that the apostolic precept points, "Pray without ceasing."

In this way, my brethren, was it understood by the first Christians, over whom the spirit of prayer was poured out so exceeding abundantly. Prayer was to them the breath of life. "Prayer," says St Clement of Alexandria, "is a walk with God. Do we whisper, nay, do we without opening our lips speak in silence to God? Then we cry, indeed, to God from our inmost soul, for God always hears the full and complete inward turning to him." He, therefore, who thinks that he prays then only when he, either in retirement and solitude, or in society with others, utters certain fixed forms of prayer, *that* man has not yet understood the peculiar

sense of the words, "pray without ceasing." Rather is the whole life of the believer a continual uninterrupted prayer, of which that which is ordinarily called "prayer," is but a part. This view the early Christians took of the matter, as the father we have just quoted writes of the true believers: "He will pray in every place, but not openly, to be gazed on by the multitude. In his walks, in his connection with others, in stillness, in reading, in performing works which employ his reasoning powers, in all things he prays. And, when in the closet of his soul, he thinks on God, and calls on the Father with gentle sighing, he is near to him and by him, whilst he is still addressing him." In the same way Origen explains it, when he says: "*He* prays without ceasing who rightly unites prayer and action, whilst even his works make up a part of his prayer; for we can then only obtain a practical sense from the words of the apostle, 'pray without ceasing,' when we consider the life of the believer as one continuous prayer, of which, what is generally called prayer, forms only a part." And in relation to "the Lord's prayer," this same Origen says: "We dare not believe that in this *words* alone are taught us, which we are to repeat at a stated season of prayer. If we understand aright what 'pray without ceasing' means, our whole life must exclaim, 'Our Father, which art in heaven,' and this takes place when we walk not on earth but in heaven; when we are ourselves thrones and temples of God; for the kingdom of God is in all them who bear the image of the heavenly man, and thereby have themselves become heavenly."

To the Christians in the primitive times of the church, prayer appeared to be the exercise of the spiritual priesthood. They considered themselves altogether as a priestly race, as St Peter says: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." They considered it their bounden duty, as priests of God, to offer him, in their prayer and life,

an offering of thanksgiving, as they whom he had redeemed : to Him and his service they consecrated property and life, as being his gifts and presents, in the name of Christ, and in the spirit of free and childlike love. " We are," says Justin Martyr, " through the name of Jesus, like men dedicated to God, the Creator of the universe ; through his name we have put off the spotted garment of sin, and have become the true highpriestly race of God, as God himself bears testimony, when he requires that in all places well pleasing and pure sacrifices should be offered up to him. He receives offerings from none but his priests. Only prayer and thanksgiving offered by the worthy are genuine and well pleasing offerings to God, and such alone are Christians commanded to bring." In the same way, Tertullian speaks : " Prayer is the spiritual offering which has taken the place of the offerings of the old covenant. The Gospel teaches us what God desires : ' The time cometh when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.' We are the true worshippers and priests, who pray in the spirit, and offer in God's spirit the well pleasing sacrifice of prayer. Such a sacrifice, proceeding from a heart full of devotion, nourished by faith, preserved pure by a guiltless life ; such a sacrifice must we, glorified by love, accompanied by a train of good works, amid psalms and songs of praise, bring to the altar of God."

Although, then, at some times, in particular situations and circumstances, prayer stood forth in a Christian's life as something isolated, yet, considered in itself, it is not to be a thing solitary and isolated, but a whole, hanging together with and running through life. With this it has the same relation as with other virtues of the Christian course. Thus, love sometimes exhibits itself with peculiar earnestness and force in individual instances, works, and actions ; but far from being confined to these individual expressions, it is rather the breath of the divinity which inspires the whole life. The true Christian cannot live except he love. Life and love

with him are one ; as also are life and faith, prayer and life. His whole life is but one prayer ; at one time praise and thanksgiving for the earthly gifts of God, and for the grace of redemption, for the spiritual blessing in heavenly goods, wherewith God hath richly blessed us through Jesus Christ ; at another, an expression of his helplessness, for the Christian is deeply and vitally penetrated by the consciousness, that, without God he is nothing, has nothing, can do nothing ; at another, a declaration of his earnest desire for strength and assistance from above, that he may advance in holiness and in communion with the Redeemer. This was the sense the early Christians gave to the apostolic ordinance, “ pray without ceasing ;” and we must acknowledge that it is a far worthier aspect of prayer than that narrow and confined one, according to which it is some individual act, performed at stated times and seasons, in certain places, whether consisting in spiritual effusions of the heart, or mere formularies and modes of speech.

There was no discrepancy between this and the regulation by which Christians had separate fixed seasons of prayer, which served at the same time to consecrate all of life that remained to them. They used for this purpose the ordinary hours of prayer among the Jews, viz. the hours of nine, twelve, and three in the day. These times were to serve, as Tertullian explains, for exhortations to prayer, to those who were liable to be led away from such subjects by earthly employments. Besides this, they hallowed all the more important transactions and portions of life by prayer, for everything earthly was to be sanctified by the direction of the soul to that which was heavenly. “ It does not become believers,” says Tertullian, “ to take food, or to enter the bath, without prayer, for the nourishment and refreshing of the spirit must precede that of the body, the heavenly must precede the earthly.” Every day was begun and ended with prayer, every meeting was hallowed by prayer ; with prayer all strange brethren were received and dismissed, all common cou-

sultations opened and concluded with prayer, and in times of common distress, all came together to pour forth their souls in united prayer to God. Thus was prayer at the same time a bond of brotherhood. Each one was to call on the Lord with all and for all, and to lay before the Head of the Church the occasions of all the brethren, which he was to consider his own. "The Lord wills not," says Cyprian, "that each man should pray for himself, but that each should pray for all." We do not say, "my Father," but "our Father;" and each does not pray for the forgiveness of his sins, he prays not for himself alone that he should not be led into temptation, but be delivered from the evil one. Our prayer is a common one, and when we pray, we pray not for individuals, but for the whole church, because we as members of this community are all one.

The early Christians laid no weight on outward postures at prayer; and the teachers of the Church were at great pains to shew them that the usefulness of prayer consisted not in certain positions of the body, but on a certain direction of the heart, that what was external was in itself indifferent, and the internal must never be forgotten in it. "Before you lift up your hands to heaven," says Origen, "you must lift up your hearts; and before you raise your eyes, you must raise your spirit to God. When you bow the knee, you must never forget that it is but a token of a bowed and humble spirit." Those who prayed too loudly in the congregation, are thus reminded by a father of the church: "God hears not the voice but the heart, even as he looks into the heart;" and Tertullian exclaims to those who thought that they must wash before every prayer, "What avails it to pray with washed hands but an unwashen spirit, when cleanness of heart is needful even to the hands, that they may be clean from all evil thoughts that proceed from the heart, and thus be lifted up to God! This is the true cleanness, not that external one about which so many are careful." The same writer says: "The faithful observance of the teaching of Jesus Christ paves the way to heaven, for

prayer, one of the most special of whose commands is, that we be reconciled to our brethren if we have a quarrel with them, or have injured them. For how can we come to the God of peace without peace; and how dare we ask forgiveness of sins if we refuse it to others, and continue angry with them? Prayer must proceed from a heart free from anger and all disquiet, from a spirit like that Spirit to whom it is addressed. The Holy Spirit can accept no unclean spirit, the free Spirit can receive no spirit in the bondage of earthly cares: no one takes an enemy, but only a friend, into communion with him."

Christians frequently united fasting with prayer, and were wont to call it the wings of prayer. "If fasting be used with wisdom," says a teacher of the church, "it tames the tumult of the flesh, and disarms the rage of sensuality. We see but rarely any strength of a heavenly life which has not been acquired by fasting; if the faithful wished to obtain ought from God, they fasted and were in prayer day and night." But with these Christians the essence of fasting was not in abstaining from meat and drink, but especially in the mortification of all sinful lusts. "Fast from all sins," says another father of the church; "take to thyself no food of wickedness, no sensual gratification, be not heated by the wine of gluttony, keep thyself from deceit, from evil words and thoughts. Such a fast pleaseth God well." As they strove to prepare themselves for prayer by fasting, so also they roused themselves to it by singing holy songs, as the apostle exhorts: "Teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs." "The whole life of a believer," says a father of the church, "consists in holy Christian prayer, and songs of praise, in psalms and hymns. The ploughman behind the plough, the sailor on the sea, sing forth a joyful halleluah; and even stammering children learn to sing praises to the Lord Jesus." "No hour should pass at meal-time without heavenly sweetness," says another, "and the moderate meal should be mixed with songs of praise."

Oh ! how humbled and ashamed ought we to feel, my brethren, when we are reminded of this spirit and zeal in prayer of the first Christians. How different is it now in our Christian communities. How many have unlearned prayer, and consider it something superfluous ; how many are weary, and cold, and slow to pray ; how many, lastly, have distorted, false, or inadequate views of prayer ! O, let us learn of Christian antiquity ; let us take to our hearts the apostolic mandate, “ pray without ceasing ;” let us pray that God will of his mercy richly pour out on us the spirit of prayer, for with it rich blessings will come among us ! “ The fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” says the scripture ; and this leads us in conclusion to consider,

II. What power and effect the early Christians ascribed to prayer. In this they faithfully believed the promise of the Lord, “ Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” No one who believes this promise can consider prayer as a thing useless and ineffectual ; to him it is rather a divine power, which must be accompanied by divine workings. Of this, too, those Christians had a lively conviction. Tertullian thus speaks of the power of Christian prayer : “ What may God not have granted to prayer coming from the spirit and in truth, seeing that he has required such prayer ? The prayer of the old covenant saved from fire, from the jaws of wild beasts, and from hunger, but Christ had not as yet regulated its use. How much stronger will the prayer of Christians be now after that God’s grace has been bestowed on them through Christ ? It does not, indeed, prevent us from feeling sorrow ; but it arms the sorrowing, who feel the pain, with strength to bear it ; it turns away the anger of God, it watches for enemies, it prays for the persecutors, it expiates sins, it drives away temptations, it comforts the poor in spirit, it leads the wanderer, calms the waves, feeds the poor, guides the rich, raises the fallen, sustains the falling, strengthens

them that do stand. It is the wall of faith ; our full and perfect armour against the foes that environ us on every side. Wherefore never let us enter the conflict without the armour of prayer." Origen says : " How much might each one of us tell of the workings of prayer, would he but thankfully call to mind the benefits he has received from God. Souls which had been long unfruitful, and had known their unfruitfulness, have been made fruitful by the Holy Spirit by their constant prayer. What vast powers of our enemies which threatened to destroy our divine faith have been brought to shame by prayer ! Our enemies trusted in chariots and horses, but we called on the name of the Lord, and found that, indeed, ' an horse is a vain thing for safety.' The power of splendid and seeming wisdom which has terrified many of those who passed for Christians, has often been conquered by the confidence of those who prayed. How many have escaped unhurt from the most grievous temptations through the power of prayer ? And what shall I say farther ? How many who have been given up to beasts raging against them, to wicked spirits and cruel men, quieted them all by prayer, so that their teeth could not injure us who are members of Christ ? We know, too, that such as had transgressed the commandments of the Lord, and were already in the valley of death, were saved by the prayer of repentance."

The Christians expected, and not without reason, a higher blessing on united prayer, and from the conviction that it had double power and effect, urged each other on to it. " Let us," says Clement of Rome, a disciple of the apostles, " collected together in one body, share the promises of the Lord, and cry to him urgently and sincerely with one mouth." And Ignatius, also a disciple of the apostles, and Bishop of Antioch, writes : " Come all of ye together for prayer ; let it be one prayer, one mind, one hope in unspotted love and joy, for Christ is here, and none is more precious than he." And Tertullian exhorts : " Let us all come together to

the honour of our God, that we may weary him into compliance by our incessant prayers and entreaties, for this violence is pleasing unto him."

More particularly were the early Christians convinced of the blessed effect of prayer, as regarded the knowledge of divine truth. They considered rightly that prayer was the best and most necessary means towards understanding the sacred scriptures, for they were convinced that divine things could only be known in the light of the divine Spirit, and that the fountains of heavenly wisdom were opened to men by prayer. The aids of human knowledge did not therefore suffice the most enlightened and best teachers of the church, although they by no means despised them, but they pressed on with all earnestness in zealous unceasing prayer, and saw in it the surest way to understand the divine word. Whilst Origen exhorts his pupil Gregory diligently to seek and inquire into the Holy Scriptures, he writes at the same time: "It must not suffice thee to knock and to seek, in order to learn to understand divine things, and rightly to enter into the meaning of holy scripture, nothing is more needful than prayer. To urge us to this, not only did our Saviour say: 'Knock, and it shall be opened to you; seek, and ye shall find;' but also 'pray, and it shall be given you.'"

In every relation, then, Christians in those first ages of the church expected the richest blessings from prayer, and they proved in their hearts and lives that their conviction had a firm foundation. Should not this be our belief, too, my brethren? Assuredly there are not wanting many amongst us who can, from their own experience, bear witness to the effectual power of prayer, to whom it has oftentimes proved a full fountain of comfort, peace, wisdom, and strength, and who will with their whole hearts confirm what the Psalmist declares from his own experience: "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and save them." It is on this account

that we are so often and so urgently called upon in the scriptures to pray; and prayer is represented to us as the surest means to obtain the grace of God, and to become partakers of heavenly goods. And how much is it to be lamented that so many Christians wish to know so little of prayer, and prefer to quarrel and contend about its utility, to being convinced of its power, and the blessings attending it by the exercise of prayer itself. "All angels pray," says Tertullian, "all creatures pray, the Lord himself prayed;" only we men, we *Christians*, we must add to it, are often so over wise and so foolish in our fancied wisdom, as to omit and be ashamed of prayer, to declare it useless and ridiculous. O make the attempt in earnest, my brethren, to approach God in prayer! Do distresses press upon your spirits, do crosses and afflictions oppress you, hear what the Lord says: "Call upon me in the time of trouble and I will deliver thee, so shalt thou praise me?" Divine aid is promised to prayer, and if it does not shew its power in working a miracle to deliver us out of our distresses, yet it makes us strong to bear our troubles with peaceful and calm resignation. Does the weight of your sins bow you down, and does your whole soul long for grace and peace, hear the holy promise of your God, "Of them that seek me with their whole heart I will be found." Seek, therefore, the pardoning grace of God in prayer, looking with faith to the Redeemer, ye shall not seek in vain; what ye ask shall be given you. Do you desire wisdom and understanding in divine things, which concern your salvation, take courage at what St James saith: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." And if ye stand already in faith and love, O be not weary in prayer, that the Lord would daily increase your strength, and keep you to the end in his grace and fellowship. Only let there be more zeal in prayer and all things will go better with us; for the more zealously we deal with God, with Jesus Christ, and his holy word, in prayer, the more will the power of the

world and sin over us be weakened and broken, the more certainly shall we attain to eternal salvation and our heavenly goal; for prayer brings the Holy Spirit unto our hearts and lives, who will enlighten and sanctify us, and, by Jesus Christ, keep us in the one true faith, that we may in him have peace and eternal blessedness. Let us then pray zealously, like those first Christians, that we, like them, may share that heavenly blessing which is promised to Christian prayers. Help us in this, O Jesus! Teach us thyself to pray, and urge us on powerfully by thy Holy Spirit, so that our whole life may be one prayer, and one fixed looking to thee, one unbroken walk with thee. O give us daily a rich share of thy precious aid, and fit our souls ever to look to thee out of distress and misery. Amen.

SERMON V.

THE WORTHY VIEW OF THEIR CALLING HELD BY THE
EARLY CHRISTIANS.

O THOU who hast blessed us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to thy purpose and grace, which thou hast given us in Christ Jesus, grant unto all of us thy Holy Spirit, that we may ever be mindful of our heavenly calling, and may strive and contend earnestly against every evil thing, and serve thee in holiness and righteousness, as is pleasing unto thee, that we may one day become heirs of that glory which thou hast prepared for us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

God, in his wisdom, has assigned to each one of us here on earth his peculiar calling, in which he must work according to the gifts and powers entrusted to him, and put out to usury the talent he has received, to the honour of God and the profit of society. When, therefore, we see any one neglecting this calling, and slow or indolent in performing the duties belonging to it, none of us would think of justifying or excusing him; nay, we should rather blame him, and require with justice that every man should both study to acquire the accomplishments, faculties, and knowledge, which give him the means of honourably pursuing his calling, and also should work in that calling with faithfulness and cheerfulness, in order worthily to occupy his position in society. In most cases, indeed, we find that none lack zeal, industry, or perseverance in their earthly pursuits. If there are some who neglect their duties, and prefer to live away their days in sloth and indo-

lence to giving themselves to an useful and happy activity, they certainly form the smaller number, and are as nothing compared to the multitudes of those who in this respect are void of reproach. In many cases, indeed, we can scarcely enough wonder at the earnestness and zeal men exhibit, and we perceive often among ourselves such running, and hastening, and speed, that we might heartily rejoice at this active life, were not our joy troubled by the thought, that, with the many, it is no right principle, but either earthly necessities and poverty, or covetousness and desire of wealth, that spur and urge them on, so that we might say to many, as our Lord did to Martha, "thou art careful about many things."

But beside this peculiar calling, we have all one in common, and that is, my brethren, our Christian calling, and since this concerns not things earthly, but things heavenly, not things temporal, but things eternal, not our outward well-doing, but the weal of our immortal souls, it might be expected that all would consider this vocation as the chief concern, the thing most important and essential of all things in this life, that they would sacrifice to this all things earthly, as of far less importance, and fulfil their Christian duties with the greatest earnestness, cheerfulness, and fidelity. But, alas! it is not so. Few seem really to have at heart their Christian vocation. Most have but very poor conceptions of it, and considering it as they do as something unreal, treat it only as a secondary matter, and show not the least earnestness or zeal in fulfilling its duties. They often content themselves with the name of Christians, and never ask themselves whether they walk conformably to their Christian vocation, what this vocation demands of them, and what duties it binds them to. Nothing of this troubles them, so that to them we must cry without intermission, in the words of our Lord, "one thing is needful." Yes, my brethren, one thing is needful, this one, that we approve ourselves as true Christians, and that we "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." To be a Christian is no

small or unimportant business, it is rather something so vast, so important, so glorious, that we can scarce be disturbed enough at the indifference, carelessness, and laxness of so many Christians, especially when we consider that he who neglects or lightly estimates his Christian calling, can give no security for his activity and fidelity in his earthly duties. At least he will not work with those feelings, and that spirit, which will authorize us to say of his works that they are done in God.

We have begun, my brethren, to contemplate the life of Christians during the first ages of the church, and our glance on those disciples of our Lord has already in many ways been encouraging and awakening to us. They will be to us equally models and patterns in the way in which they estimated their Christian calling. To them it appeared as a thing the highest and the holiest they could have to deal with, and most truly and conscientiously did they seek to fulfil its duties. Earthly things were not by them preferred to heavenly. Their chief concern was "to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" and the deep earnestness which they as Christians exhibited, in the view they took of their calling, forms a striking contrast to the light estimation in which most Christians of our days consider it, who deem Christianity and salvation as things unimportant or indifferent. Let us, then, this day, my brethren, learn a lesson of those first Christians, and God grant that our attention to their conduct may incite us to emulation; and to this end we implore Him for His blessing.

TEXT. I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.—Eph. iv. 1.

An exhortation, my brethren, much needed in our times, and one which cannot be too often repeated! Paul exhorts most urgently, most impressively, as a prisoner. He was in bonds for the Lord's sake: he was

in prison and in chains ; and to this his zeal, his faithfulness in his vocation, had brought him. Paul exhorts most movingly, “ in the Lord,” pointing to the love, the mercy of God who gave his life for us. Paul exhorts Christians to walk worthy of their vocation as Christians, as those whom the Lord hath called to his fellowship, to his service, to his glory. What power should such an exhortation of such an apostle have ! Do you feel this, my brethren ? If you do, your Christian calling cannot be to you a thing indifferent ; Christianity must appear to you to be something unspeakably great and important ; and you must exhibit an holy earnestness in all things belonging to your eternal happiness, an earnestness such as Paul exhibited, such as the Christians of the first ages were inspired by. This earnestness was expressed in a manner which could not but be perceived by all.

1. In the esteem in which they held their Christian vocation.

2. In the life which they led conformably to this calling.

These two subjects will afford us matter enough for two meditations, my brethren ; and we will therefore consider the first point to-day, and the second, if God will, on the next occasion.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth ; thy word is truth. Amen.

How used the Christians of the first ages to look on their calling, my brethren ? They looked on themselves as “ soldiers of the Lord,” as a priestly nation, and as “ children of God,”—all of them views in which a holy earnestness was exhibited.

No reader of the Bible can be ignorant how often in Holy Scripture the life of a Christian is drawn as a continued conflict, and the Christian himself as the soldier of Christ. “ I have fought a good fight,” says St Paul, as he looks back on his apostolic career. “ Do thou endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,”

writes he to Timothy. No one used this image more frequently, no one knew how to apply it to life more profitably than this apostle. Now he depicts the enemies against whom we have incessantly to contend: "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Now he shows the arms which we are to put on for this conflict, in order that we may come out conquerors: "Put on the armour of God and stand, having your loins girt about with truth; and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." Now he holds up to our view the prize which shall reward the conqueror, "an incorruptible crown," the heritage of eternal life. Now he reminds us of the holy earnestness, with which we must conduct the battle: "No man that warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; and if a man also strive for masteries, yet he is not crowned except he strive lawfully." All these images taken from holy Scripture, which present so lively a picture of the Christian's vocation and life, are embodied in our treasures of spiritual songs. Think only of such hymns as these:

"Up, ye Christians, to the fight!
Ye must arm yourselves with might:
For the foe desires to slay you."

or thus:

"Up with zeal, ye Christian soldiers,
Follow straight your Saviour's steps!"

or Luther's hymn

"A castle firm is our God."

And when we consider how truly in their situation and all their relations the early Christians were soldiers and combatants, we shall be the less surprised at the love they had for this image, as representing their calling. Could they profess their faith freely and without hindrance? To us, indeed, it is granted to serve the Lord

in rest and peace : we are not attacked and fought against for the gospel's sake ; alas, this quiet and undisturbed possession of the holiest things makes us too often indifferent to them, and we forget (alas ! how easily) the reality and importance of our calling. But those first Christians were hated and persecuted by Jews and heathens, and could not profess their faith without the greatest dangers. It was therefore natural for them to consider themselves as soldiers of Christ, against the hostile powers which threatened the destruction of the youthful church, and it was scarcely possibly for them ever to lose sight of their call to spiritual knighthood. They therefore called their baptismal vow their oath, as Christian soldiers ; for they pledged themselves by it solemnly, to renounce the devil and all his works, and to lead a life dedicated to God, following the steps of Jesus Christ. Their profession of faith, which they made at baptism, was therefore called their Christian watchword (*symbolum*) ; the sign of the cross with which they commenced every thing of importance, appeared to them as the picture of their heavenly guide, as soldiers were wont to bear the picture of their emperor on their brows ; and when they were assembled to prayer, and wished to lift up their hearts to the Lord, they looked upon this as if they stood at their post before God, and kept watch in his presence. And lastly, they expected, when they parted from the battle field, to receive from the hands of their captain, even Christ, the crown of victory, as his gracious reward for the fidelity they had exhibited. Conformably to these views of the Christian calling, Tertullian writes, in order to exhort the Christians to firmness under hard persecutions : “ We were called to be the soldiers of the living God, then, when we answered ‘ yea ’ to the questions proposed to us, as our military oath. No warrior goes out of his chamber with his comforts, but out of the camp where men are hardened and inured to every difficulty. Even in peace soldiers are taught by labour and toils to endure war, by being constantly under arms, and exercising themselves. Where-

fore, ye blessed ones, look on all things that press hard upon you as exercise of your powers. You are fighting a good fight, where God arrays the battle, where the holy Spirit conducts the exercises for the battle, and the reward of victory is a life like that of angels, everlasting glory in heaven."

And truly, my brethren, did those Christians prove themselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ! They resisted, even to blood, for their faith's sake, they quailed not at dangers and persecutions, they remained steadfast even unto death, and willingly sacrificed all things, even life itself, for the service of him who had purchased them for himself. Let us learn from them "to run with patience the race that is set before us!" Have we not sworn to follow the banner of our Lord, when we were given over to him in holy baptism? Have we not vowed fidelity to him even unto death? Are we not called to be spiritual soldiers? Let us then remember this holy calling, and fight boldly the Lord's battles, and steadfastly strive against the world, and sin, and the devil, looking up to "the author and finisher of our faith." Free thyself from every thing which may impede thee in the fight: "Crucify thy flesh with its affections and lusts; fight not as one that beateth the air," but with knightly zeal; put on the spiritual arms, which the apostle recommends to thee, and lay them not down before thy captain call thee from the battle field, to crown thee, out of his infinite mercy, with the crown of victory! Oh how entirely do many Christians forget their heavenly vocation to be soldiers of Christ, and give themselves up carelessly to rest, whilst they should watch and pray, and strive without ceasing. How many do nothing but beat the air, allow themselves to be frightened by every hindrance, become cowards, and faint at every danger, and shew none of the earnestness which is needful to win the crown of life? Be not thou like them! Look to thy Saviour, who calls thee to the conflict, follow after him with boldness, and sing joyously thy song of faith:

" The treasure is before me placed
 If I but bravely fight ;
 Therefore mine arm is ever braced,
 And God supplies me might.
 On ! bravely on !
 The fight is won,
 I see the crown He on my brows will place,
 And I will worst the foe, if He but give His grace."

II. Not less profitable in its effects on their lives was another view, according to which the early Christians gladly considered themselves priests of God, and in this also the earnestness of their feelings was exhibited beyond the possibility of mistake. Christianity knows nothing of a visible, separate, and peculiar priesthood, such as existed under the old covenant, where the priests ordained of God had especially to care for the satisfying of the religious wants of all the rest, and likewise first to mediate their communion with God ; for Christ, the sole and eternal high-priest, has opened to all believers an access to God and to heaven, He has cleared away every thing which separated men from God, so that all who belong to him, have to regard themselves as a consecrated spiritual people, in which every individual appears as a priest of the most High. Under this aspect, then, the call of the Christian can be none other than this, to dedicate his whole life to God, as a thankoffering for the grace of redemption. This life must be a continual priesthood, a spiritual worship of God, proceeding from the feeling of a faith working by love, a constant acknowledgment of Christ, and a witness to his power and mercy. Thus, then, has Christianity removed every distinction which existed of yore among men in relation to these higher matters. They all form a priestly and a spiritual people. It seems scarcely to need any proof that this view is drawn from holy writ, and deeply grounded in the very essence of Christianity. " Ye are a chosen generation," writes the apostle Peter to the Christians, " a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light."

On this account, such modes of viewing the Christian vocation were very frequent among the fathers of the church, and Christians of the first centuries. "All just men have the rank of priests," says Irenæus; and the same father writes: "The Jews consecrated their tenths to God; but Christians, who have attained to liberty, dedicated their all joyfully and freely to the service of God." And Tertullian expresses himself with especial vehemence concerning this common priesthood of all Christians. He says, "We are priests as called thereunto of God. The most High-priest, Christ, whilst he clothed us with that which is his,—for 'as many of us as are baptised have put on Christ,'—made us kings and priests before God and his Father." He therefore demands of all Christians the same striving after purity of thought and life. "We are mad," he writes, "if we believe that laymen are allowed that which priests are forbidden. Are we laymen not priests also? Each man lives by his own faith, and there is no respect of persons with God, since not those who hear the law are justified before God, but those who do it. There is one God, one faith, one law of life for all." To this also belongs what Origen writes against Celsus, to defend the Christians from the reproach of having no pictures, altars, or temples: "Among us," says he, "the souls of the just are the temples from which ascend those offerings spiritual and well pleasing unto God, prayers out of a clear conscience. The statues, the offerings worthy of God, not made by men's hands, but formed by the word of God, are the virtues by which we form ourselves according to the 'first-born of every creature,' in whom is the prototype of all righteousness and wisdom. The most noble picture, far exalted above all creation, is in our Saviour, who was able to say of himself, 'the Father is in me;' but also in each of those who imitate Him to the best of their power, is the picture of Him who hath created him, as it proceeds from looking to God with a pure heart. And, above all, Christians strive to raise in their hearts such altars and statues as should receive into them-

selves the Spirit of God, who unites himself with those that are akin to him, in contradistinction to those lifeless and soulless ones into which idols are banished. This the Holy Scriptures shew us, when God promises to the just, ‘ I will walk among you, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people ;’ and our Saviour shews it also, when he says, ‘ He that loveth me will keep my commandments, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him.’ ”

When men began, at the end of the second century, to swerve from this view, and falsely to introduce a Jewish priesthood into the Christian church, as if in it also there ought to be the same visible and external priesthood, and a priestly race peculiarly dedicated to God, the original spirit of Christianity that still remained opposed this unevangelical pretension, and the laity claimed that they too, as Christians, were a priestly people. Equally clearly and impressively did the teachers of the church declare against the pride of those who sought to make a distinction between a higher, esoteric, priestly doctrine and a popular religion, who prided themselves on a higher knowledge, and who were wont to call themselves spiritually minded, in contradistinction to the multitude of those who, as they thought, had too carnal views of Christianity. In opposition to these, the principle was firmly maintained, that all Christians have a part in the same simple faith, and, through this faith, in a higher life ; that all that truly acknowledge Jesus Christ, are men necessarily enlightened by the Spirit of God, and of truly spiritual minds. And when many indolent Christians made use of that false distinction to escape from exhortations to greater earnestness of life, and to excuse themselves by saying, that “ they were no philosophers, they had not learned to read, and consequently could not read the Bible,” Clement of Alexandria, among others, repelled such a pretext, by saying, “ Even if they cannot read, they have no excuse, because they can hear the word of God ; faith is not the property of the worldly wise, but of the wise in God.”

Such excuses are not unfrequently heard in our days, my brethren, for unhappily the earnest consideration of the spiritual priesthood is almost entirely lost, and that not only in the Roman church, where it was completely depressed, and where the delusion of a peculiarly sacred priesthood has again arisen, but also in our own evangelical church, where the majority are no longer conscious of their priestly dignity, and where with it the proper earnestness in the exercise of the holiest Christian duties has disappeared. For how many are there that think that searching into the sacred Scriptures, occupying themselves with heavenly things, and greater earnestness in Christian life, is the business of the clergy only, and cannot reasonably be expected of every body. Hence comes the great ignorance among our Christians, hence the great want of acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures which so many exhibit, hence their light-minded, immoral, and wordly life and conduct. But it must not be so, my brethren! You must all administer your priesthood before God; you must look on yourselves as a people dedicated to the Lord; and you are all bound by duty to a spiritual life. Your houses must be houses of God, your dwellings temples, your hearts altars, your families churches of the Lord. Then shall the spiritual offerings of faith and love, of prayer and thanksgiving, be offered by all; then shall all be taught of God, enlightened and sanctified by His spirit, and all men shall give themselves up to the Lord, together with all that they are and have. No strange fire should burn upon the altar of your hearts, no fire of unholy lusts and sinful desires, but the fire of the purest love for God and man alone, lighted by the spirit of Him who hath called you to be his peculiar people. O, that we all knew our dignity and our duty! That none of us would forget that we are a priestly race, dedicated to God, and, as such, bound to bring the sacrifices to God that are well pleasing unto him, the sacrifices of a pure heart, and a holy life, in faith and love.

III. Lastly, the Christians of the first centuries gladly looked on their new situation as that of children of God, in relation to their new birth of the Spirit, and to that newness of life, to which Christ has roused us. This representation, also, is drawn from Holy Scripture ; for our attention is often directed there to the new childlike relation in which we stand to God, our heavenly Father, as redeemed by Jesus Christ. “Ye are all children of God, through faith on Jesus Christ,” says St Paul ; and St Peter writes, “As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” And not only does this new relation of sonship remind us of the most valuable blessings which the love of God, our heavenly Father, has prepared for us, through Jesus Christ, for time and eternity, but it also holds before us our holiest duties, namely, that we should become as children, that we should walk in the pure unquestioning spirit of a child, without selfishness or falsehood, in unfettered, upright resignation to God. And hence was the custom derived which prevailed in many parts of Africa, of setting before newly baptised persons, as a sign of that Christian sonship, and the childlike mind so inseparable from it, a mixture of milk and honey, with which infants are fed. Hence, too, they called Christ the educator of children, as condescending always to their needs, in order to draw them up to him. Thus, Clement of Alexandria says, in a song of praise to Christ, “Collect thy simple-hearted children that they may praise thee with a holy mind, that they may laud thee without deceit, and with innocent lips, as Christ the leader of children.” Oh ! that we, too, had always a lively consciousness of our childlike relation to God, my brethren ! How joyfully should we then praise our heavenly Father, with what confidence should we pray to him, with what comfort should we trust on him, how zealously should we study to please him, how anxiously should we avoid vexing and troubling his paternal heart by our sins, and how heartily should we always thank him who hath thus made us his children ! But alas ! how few Christians are there who consider with due

earnestness that they are the children of God, and, as such, called and bound to love their Father in heaven above all things, and always to subject themselves in childlike obedience to his will!

Thus did the first Christians gladly consider themselves as free children in the kingdom of grace, in contradistinction to the servants under the dominion of the law, or as servants made free by the Redeemer, remembering the words of the Lord: "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed!" But they knew that the true liberty of the sons of God is not a liberty to sin, but rather a freedom from the dominion of sin, and therefore they hastened more zealously after holiness, and proved themselves to be free, by fulfilling God's holy law, out of love and gratitude to him, with joy and delight, as is demanded of us all. "Christ has not freed us," says Irenæus, "that we should forsake him, but that the more we have obtained his grace, the more heartily we should love him." Oh that we would take this seriously to heart, my brethren. Yes! Christ has obtained for us freedom, a blessed freedom, freedom from the curse of sin, from the burdensome dominion of the law, but not in order that we should with less trouble give the rein to the flesh, for were this the case, we should not be free, but be the servants of the flesh and of sin; but in order that we should fulfil the law, from hearty gratitude for the grace of redemption, and from the free impulse of love, and seek our meat in doing the will of our Father which is in heaven. "Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh;" walk as "free, but not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God!" Thus only shall we give men to know that we have rightly comprehended our dignity as children of God; and thus only have we a right to exclaim joyfully with the apostle, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Amen.

SERMON VI.

THE EARNESTNESS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS IN FOR-
SAKING THE WORLD.

IN thee alone, O Lord, our soul finds rest and peace. Thou givest to them that are thine life and full contentment: thou fillest the hungry with good things; thou refreshest all that are weary and heavy laden, thou causest all to rejoice and be glad who seek for thee; and thou crownest them that love thee with grace and mercy. Wherefore, we ask not for heaven or earth. If we have but thee, O Lord, we shall want nothing; then shall we be blessed, and though we were to sorrow, both in soul and body, yet thou wouldst be the comfort of our hearts and our portion. O Lord, we will never forsake thee, to thee will we live and die; and do thou bless us, both here and ever, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The more frivolous men are, my brethren, and the more they seek after enjoyment, the less likely are they to take delight in the gospel, and the lighter will be the estimation in which they hold all things holy. Christianity is something too earnest for them to become friends with it, its teaching and injunctions contradict too much their most cherished inclinations for them willingly to follow it, the professors of the faith seem far too gloomy and strict for them not to find causes of stumbling and grievance, and to attack them with reviling and enmity. The gospel preaches self-denial, and denial of all ungodly things, and worldly lusts, as an indispensable condition of partaking of the kingdom of God. How, then, is it likely that those men

would receive it, whose whole love is turned to the world, and to their own idle enjoyments and pleasures! The gospel particularly impresses on us that we should seek earnestly and steadfastly the sanctification of our minds and lives. How could it, then, be pleasing to those who find the highest happiness of their lives only in the unimpeded satisfaction of their fleshly lusts and desires? No! as light and darkness are irreconcilably opposed to each other, so can Christianity and worldly-mindedness never be united together. Where the one rules, the other must needs yield. Earthly desires find no place in a heavenly minded heart, any more than heavenly desires do in a carnal and sensual spirit. Is it not this truth, which our Lord declares unto us when he says: "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

If there be one accusation more than another which can be brought with justice against our times, my brethren, it is plainly that of love of pleasure. Far and wide, among all ranks and classes rules a sensual, worldly mind, and we might be disposed to affirm of the present generation what the Romans, when their empire was decaying and crumbling away, had constantly in their mouths, that they desired nothing more than bread and sight-seeing. The aim and end of by far the greater portion of our contemporaries is only how best to satisfy earthly necessities and sensual pleasures; and those who have comprehended what life really is, and who shrink from making common cause with the great masses of the people in their pursuits, who retire from the world, and the vanities of the life that endure but for a season, in order to offer a more unimpeded service to their God and Saviour, in stillness and retirement, must be content to be cried down and mocked, and branded with the name of foolish enthusiasts, or hypocritical pietists. Gluttonous feasts and drinking parties are considered nothing strange or repulsive; but where Christians assemble "to build themselves up

on their most holy faith," and to pray, men are astonished, and cannot sufficiently express their dislike to such meetings. So incapable is worldly-mindedness of appreciating the high earnestness of a Christian disposition and a Christian life. To him a Christian's life appears something gloomy and joyless, a dark enthusiasm or intolerable singularity, when in fact the highest and purest happiness, the noblest joys, bloom for the Christian in his daily walk with God and his Redeemer, far from the world and its vain pleasures.

We must by no means, however, conceal from you, my brethren, that true Christians are always distinguished by a lofty earnestness, and a severity towards themselves, which will permit and endure nothing which is irreconcilable with the nature of Christianity; and even if some, through a conscientious and anxious care for their salvation, sometimes go farther in this severity than is necessary, yet we must all of us confess that we had better have too much of it than too little. Too great earnestness, if only it be in all sincerity, cannot hurt us, but not so over great compliance and excessive laxity. Let us see how the early Christians acted on this point! At our last meeting we learned what a lofty earnestness they exhibited in the manner and light in which they comprehended their Christian vocation. The same earnestness, the same severity, was evinced in their lives, and the position which, in contradistinction to the world, they occupied, shews us how carefully they sought to follow the injunction of the apostle, "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." To this point, with earnest prayer to the Holy Spirit for his assistance, I will this day direct your attention.

TEXT. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.—1 John, ii. 15.

Here, my brethren, you perceive in what opposition God and the world stand; and whom must not the de-

claration of the apostle, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," strike with the thought, "there remains then but only one course, we must make our choice." If we wish to hold to God, we must entirely deny the world and the lusts thereof. But if we would belong to the world in such a way that its mind should dwell in us, its spirit impel us, its principles guide us, its goods, enjoyments, and delights fetter us, we must give up at once God and his service, we must forsake and deny our Saviour. To love and carry in our heart God and the world at the same time is utterly impossible. The Lord says it, his apostle repeats it, experience confirms it: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Whither, then, shall we turn? Hear, my fellow Christian, is thy salvation dear to thee, dost thou seek peace, wouldst thou be blessed? Hear then, and follow the counsel which the apostle gives us in the text, "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." This is his ordinance, and the Christians of earlier times took this ordinance into their hearts. This is testified by the holy earnestness which was manifested in their bearing and life as opposed to the world; this is testified by the decision with which they denied and fought against the ungodly and frivolous spirit of the world, which was so alien to their Christian vocation. Wherefore let us with all zeal follow their example, that we may manifestly "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called," knowing that the love of the Father hath dominion in us, and that "the love of Christ constraineth us," urging us on "to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling."

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. The holy earnestness which was so manifest in the life of the early Christians, as opposed to that of the world, was exhibited, first in this, that they resolutely denied and fought against every thing in itself ungodly

and sinful. The gospel sense of "the world" is in fact ungodliness; every thing which in and for itself is sin, and which makes men unclean, and pollutes them; every thing which is entirely irreconcilable with the service of God, with the love to him, and with the following of Christ Jesus. This is indicated by the apostle, when, immediately after our text he says: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." In as far, then, as "world" means the same as "sin," in as far as it betokens that which is ungodly in thought, word, and work, in so far was it the watch-word of those Christians, "Far from the world, and near to Christ." And could it be otherwise, considering the direction which, under the influence of grace and of the spirit of Jesus Christ, their whole life had taken? They considered themselves as the redeemed of the Lord, and therefore belonging no more to themselves but to him who had redeemed them. *He* therefore necessarily was their life, and they could not possibly "be conformed to this world," but must "be renewed in the spirit of their mind; they became necessarily "new creatures," through the spirit which he had imparted to them; and conformably to their inward life they were separate from the world, in as far as it stood in opposition to the kingdom of God. Their walk was necessarily in heaven. They were a generation dedicated to God, "a holy nation, a peculiar people; that they should shew forth the praises of him who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light." Consequent on this necessarily came the injunction to "crucify the flesh, with its lusts and desires," and to seek after holiness with unintermitted earnestness and zeal. And this, my brethren, comes especially home to us also. The world is in us, we dare not seek for it out of us, not in the things which surround us, in those things which we see and hear; for although it be there also, yet we carry it all within us, through our sinful nature: we have it in our hearts; sin, that is, the world, is in us, and we must deny and combat it with the same

earnestness as did those early Christians ; we must daily purify ourselves more completely from it in faith on that Redeemer who bought us so dearly, so that at the last we may exclaim with St Paul, “ The world is crucified to me, and I to the world.” If we once conquer the world within us, the world without us, that is, every thing impure, ungodly, and sinful, which we remark among men, and which so often becomes a trial to us, and causes us to fall, will cease to have any point of attraction to us ; we shall easily overcome it through the love of the Father, which will have become a ruling principle in us, and through the Spirit of the Son who dwells in our hearts, and consecrates them for temples of God. In this, also, let us exhibit all earnestness, my brethren, and in the fight of self-denial let us put to death our own sinful life, in order that Christ may become our life, may be to us all in all, and that we henceforth may find our highest happiness, our highest glory and delight in the love of the Father. Alas ! how much are our times wanting in this earnestness, this decision in self-denial, and in the combat with our own sinful lusts and desires ! There are so many among Christians who love the world, and carry it in their hearts ; who suffer, and nourish and cherish sin within them, so that there is scarcely a trace of the love of the Father to be met with in their lives and hearts, and because they love the world that is within them, they love also that which is in the world, all that is ungodly and sinful around them, all that flatters their sensuality, all that pleases the flesh, and thus their whole life passes away in self-gratification. And if we warn them of this, if we demand of them to deny the world and their lusts, they think that we wish to turn them into gloomy, sad enthusiasts, to make a sin of all that they have, their pleasures, their enjoyment, their intercourse with the world, and that we are asking of them impossibilities, in demanding of them to give up all communion with the world, in which, nevertheless, they are placed, and called upon by God to live.

But, my brethren, this is not the case, and whoever

speaks thus shews that he either does not or will not understand us. We do indeed oppose this holy earnestness to love of the world and its pleasures: it is this that Christianity preaches; but it is so far from being a gloomy fanatical earnestness, that it is rather the only way to true joy. The kingdom of God is indeed not meat and drink, not blind seeking after enjoyment, nor foolish worldly pleasure, but still is it no gloomy and troublous thing: it is rather "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and we by no means desire of you to forsake and fly from the world, to separate and withdraw yourselves misanthropically from society, but we call upon you, even while in the world, to fly it. Remain in the world, but the world must not remain in you, but must be overcome by means of the love of the Father; for you have this holy calling, as Christians, as disciples of Him who was in the world, but not of it, to follow Him, and be likened unto Him, that you may "shine like lights" in the world, and, through the Spirit which dwelleth in you, exercise a plastic and ennobling influence on all around you. But this is foolishness and a stumbling-block to the natural man who loves the world. He cannot understand it, and therefore takes up a hostile position against that gospel which makes such an holy earnestness the duty of its professors. It was no otherwise in the first ages of our church. To the heathens who lived in worldly pleasure, Christianity seemed a religion of gloomy severity, and they reviled Christians as a race that hated the light, that was dead to and therefore useless to the world,—a reproach which, even now, worldly-minded men are wont to cast against the more earnest among Christians. To such accusations Tertullian thus answers: "How should those men be useless in life, who live among you, who have the same expenses, the same clothing, the same needs with you? We are no dwellers in the woods, no hermits who fly from life. We are not, be sure, unmindful of the gratitude which we owe to our Lord God. We do not despise any enjoyment of his gifts, we only seek to preserve the proper mean,

and to avoid abuses. We therefore do not inhabit this world without sharing with you your markets, your bathing establishments, your inns, your workshops, your fairs, and every thing which belongs to the intercourse of life. We carry on commerce with you, we serve in your armies, we join in agriculture, and trade with you. We take part in your earnings, and give our labour for public use, for the service of the state." Thus, then, we see what was the mind of the early Christians. They did not consider it sinful to labour in the world, to use and to enjoy what the mercy of God had given them, they only took care that the Spirit of the Lord, who had inspired them, and given to their whole life a new direction, a direction towards things heavenly, should hallow all acts and pleasures of those who, although even here below citizens of heaven, yet, according to the flesh, were still compelled to dwell upon earth. And this must, even now, be the case with all who wish truly to follow Jesus. We require of them no external renunciation of things earthly : we do not forbid them the possession of earthly goods, or the enjoyment of earthly pleasures ; we lay stress only on the inward renunciation of things earthly, and preach with the apostle Paul : " It remaineth for those that have wives that they be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing it ; for the fashion of this world passeth away." Thus thought, and thus lived, the first Christians. They were and remained in the world, but they did not love the world : they did not clasp their heart-strings round the goods and pleasures of life, in such a manner as to forget their God, their Saviour, and their call to inherit eternal life, for they knew the vanity and perishableness of all earthly things ; and although they received thankfully all earthly gifts, as testimonies of the mercy and loving kindness of their heavenly Father, yet they were far from that heathen enjoyment of the world which only manifested itself in

a blind giddy search for pleasure, and to which, consequently, Christian faith must have appeared as fanatic piety. Beyond this, also, they found it needful to withdraw themselves on certain days from worldly communion, in order to prove their hearts before God in rest and solitude, to dedicate their lives anew to him in prayer, and then, with new zeal, and new powers of holiness, to return to their wonted business. These were days of holy use, days of prayer, penitence, and fasting, which individual Christians chose for themselves, according to their own particular necessities. Many, also, in order to shew strongly their contempt of those earthly things to which they had before been fettered, stripped themselves, in their first glow of love to their Saviour, of all earthly goods, and gave them to the poor, whilst they applied to themselves the Lord's words: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." They were ready to sacrifice all earthly things, in order to gain this heavenly treasure. These men, however, did not retire into solitude, in order to lead an idle and contemplative life, but remained in the community, lived by the labour of their hands, were unwedded, that they might be able, undisturbed by earthly cares, to give themselves up to holy meditations and prayer, and pious working for the kingdom of God; and whatever they could save by the most penurious mode of life from the produce of their labour, they applied conscientiously to the purposes of Christian love. These men were called "ascetics," that is, "the continent," and were zealous aimers at Christian perfection. And who would blame or condemn such an earnestness in denial of the world, if the heart were really seeking by it God and things eternal, if men did not consider such a mode of life as in itself meritorious, if spiritual pride did not lie hid beneath such contempt of all earthly things,—if, above all, that chief concern, inward holiness, which consists in humility and love, were not overlooked or neglected,—if, in fine, the earnest

words of the apostle were always preserved in view : " Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." But if this were once forgotten, as unhappily in the later years of the church it was daily more and more, then that mode of life became quite perverted and unchristian, quite departing from the spirit of the gospel, and in reality nothing more than hypocritically whitening the inward corruption with an outward appearance of holiness. Against this direction of men's minds, so false and opposed to the gospel, in which we perceive at once the bud of the monachism which followed, the teachers of the church strove with great earnestness, whilst they called men's attention to the essence of Christian feelings, by which alone every thing external possessed its proper signification. " Before all," says one of them, " shew thy continence in this, in guarding thyself against speaking or hearing evil things, in purifying thy heart from all defilement, from all revenge and avarice." Clement of Alexandria reminds them : " As humility is not shown in the humiliation of the body, but in gentleness of disposition, so is continence a virtue of the soul, which consists, not in things external, but internal. Continence not only refers to some particular individual sin, not to pleasure alone, but to be continent means also to despise money, to tame the tongue, to overcome evil by our reason."

From this, the earnest Christian spirit of those first centuries may be clearly seen. It kept the due mean between frivolous worldliness and blind seeking after enjoyment, and high-minded contempt of the world. It consisted, not in the outward renunciation of earthly things, as if all earthly goods and enjoyments were in themselves irreconcilable with the spirit of Christian holiness, but it was manifested in the removing of love to the world from the heart. It was this that seemed to them the thing most essential and indispensable, that every man should, by the power of faith, reject and contend against the inward desire for earthly things,

and the inward pleasure in them, that, in fact, which constitutes the world in men, all that is sinful in him, but not that, under the veil of contempt of the world, he should cherish a love for it in his heart. This grand point was especially treated of by Clement of Alexandria, in a beautiful work on the question, "How the rich man must act, in order to be saved?" In this he takes the opportunity of shewing, how, before God, all depends on the thought of the heart. "The Saviour," he writes, "does not command us, as many superficially think, to cast away our earthly possessions, but to banish from the soul the high estimation of money, the desire after it,—that sickness of the soul, and the cares for earthly things,—those thorns which choke the seeds of divine light. What is it that the Lord teaches as something new, as that which alone brings life, which men knew not before? What is the strange thing,—the new creation,—according to his teaching? He does not require, as others have done, the external, but something greater, more divine, more perfect, of which the other is but an exponent, namely, that the soul itself should be purified from all lusts and desires, and every thought strange to purity should be rooted out and annihilated. For many, who before despised external things, forsook, indeed, and sold their earthly property, but the desires of the soul only grew stronger in them; for they became filled with vanity, high-mindedness, and contempt of other men, as though they had done something superhuman. A man may have thrown away his earthly goods, and yet still retain his desire after them, so as to be doubly disquieted by repentance at his extravagance, and by the want of necessities. And how could one man impart of his goods to another, when no man possessed any thing? Does not such an assertion come into opposition with many other great precepts of our Lord, such as when he exhorts, 'Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations;' and 'lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither

moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.' How? If all men stripped themselves of their earthly goods, who could then feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, take in the stranger, when yet the Lord threatens eternal fire to those who omit to do this? Earthly goods are like materials for a good use, for those who understand how to use them well."

Thus, then, my brethren, you see how perfectly the Christians of those days comprehended the nature of Christianity. Earnestness requires earnestness in its professors, and that no dark and gloomy feeling, which is forced to manifest itself in high-minded contempt for the world, and deems it a duty to renounce all earthly possessions and enjoyments, but a holy zeal, manifesting itself in the rejection of all love for the world and its pleasures, that is, partly in contending with the sinfulness it meets with in every heart, and in the crucifying of the lusts of the flesh which strive in man for the mastery, partly in the inward, complete renunciation of all which is earthly, vain and perishable, so that we should admit no attachment to the goods and joys of this world, which hinders us from loving the Lord above all things, and rendering to Him our exclusive homage. But if we have rendered ourselves inwardly free from the desire of that which is earthly, and love of what belongs to the world, then, indeed, the possession and enjoyment of earthly gifts and goods is no longer any thing sinful, because we are not thereby impeded in running the race of holiness, nay, rather, we find in them the means of forwarding the work of sanctification in ourselves, and labouring for the extension of God's kingdom. Such an holy earnestness the Christians of the first centuries exhibited in their lives. They loved not the world; the spirit that animated them was the spirit of love to God and their Redeemer; to him they dedicated their whole lives. And, for this very cause, that they belonged to the Lord, were they free from the world. They looked on earthly things as the gift and present of God, who

in this also had shown his loving-kindness toward them, and they used and enjoyed them with thanks to the heavenly donor, but they were very far from setting too high a value on them. They did not deem them an end, but only means to an end, and they found it not hard to give up and renounce every thing for the Lord's sake, if need required. Their hearts were not bound up with such things. How different do we find it now with the majority of Christians! Their heart, estranged from God, belongs to the world; they love the world, and the things that are therein. Hence arises the anxious care for earthly things; hence the untameable desire for the possession and increase of earthly goods, which often thinks no means too bad by which it may arrive at the goal; hence the more than heathen hunting after pleasure, rough and rude in the lower, refined in the higher classes of society. Earthly things are no longer considered as means, they become the end itself. To earn and to enjoy are the watchwords of our times: these are the goals to which the multitudes press on; these are the aims to which all others must yield. One enjoyment follows close upon another, and opportunities for worldly distractions and gratifications become daily more and more. How can a higher life advance amid such circumstances, and with such a mind? Where every thing is calculated for the gratification of sensuality alone, all earnest occupation of the soul about that which transcends the senses must be set aside. Where the whole life has become an external one, the inward "hidden life of the soul with Christ in God" must appear to be foolish fanaticism. Where the world has obtained dominion in the heart, the love of the Father must grow cold, and that doctrine must be unwelcome and hateful which makes self-denial, and denial of the world and its lusts, the first and most especial duty, and which commands us with holy earnestness "to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." O let us think, my brethren, of those things "which make for our peace!" The world can give us no peace, no salvation. Christ

is our peace : in Him alone is our safety ; in following Him is blessedness.

“ Let us then with Jesus hie,
His example following still :
In the world, the world we'll fly,
And to heaven journey will :
On the path he made we'll go,
Heavenly 'mid our earthly strife ;
Sound in faith, and good in life,
In our love our faith we'll shew.”

We live in the world, but let us not be of the world, not love the world, and live for it ! Let us learn from the Christians of the first centuries what our calling is, to deny and fight against the world, that is, every thing ungodly and sinful, with all holy earnestness. Let their example encourage us, their pattern arouse us ; then shall our walk be in heaven, and we shall be one day blessed heirs of an eternal inheritance.

Our contemplation is not yet ended, my brethren. We have yet much to say of the holy earnestness of the lives of the first Christians, but our time has expired, and we must defer the continuation of our contemplation. If God will, we will resume the thread of our discourse on the next occasion. Till then, let us each in silence meditate on what we have heard ; and may the Lord bless the words this day spoken, and crown them with abundant fruit, to the praise and honour of His name. Amen.

SERMON VII.

EARNESTNESS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS IN FORSAKING
THE WORLD.

O Lord, our God, hear our humble supplications, and bless us, and grant us to become daily more zealous in serving thee, as may be pleasing unto thee. We willingly renounce all vanities which are at enmity with thy service. We dedicate and give up to thee, as thine, ourselves, our souls and bodies. Thou alone it is whom we serve, and to whom we belong. O receive our offering mercifully, and keep us faithful to the end, so that we may one day attain to everlasting blessedness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We have begun to speak, my brethren, of the holy earnestness which Christians in the first ages manifested in their lives, and our last contemplation of it shewed us how this earnestness exhibited itself, as opposed to the world, in every station and relation of life in which they were placed. On this head, the apostolic exhortation was their grand principle and rule, "Love not the world, neither the things that are therein. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." This principle they followed with conscientious fidelity; and accordingly, they considered it to be the grand calling and duty of their lives to deny and contend against the world, in so far as under that name all sin and ungodliness was comprehended. They had, indeed, taken Christ into their hearts: He accordingly was their life; His spirit dwelt in them, and gave their mind and their aims such tendencies, that they could truly affirm, "Our walk is in heaven." But in this case, they were obliged to follow their Redeemer on

the path of self-denial ; for he himself declares, “ If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” And as they, by following on this path in the power of faith, and from love to the Redeemer, to whose service they had dedicated themselves, overcame the world *in* themselves, that is, sin, and every ungodly feeling, and busied themselves to live soberly, righteously, and honestly in this world, so also could they overcome the world *without* themselves, that is, every ungodly and sinful thing which met them in their relations with society, and threatened to draw them away from good, to allure and seduce them to evil. To deny all this, and contend against it with all earnestness, they considered to be their holy calling, and placed it before every other duty.

But if we understand, under the name of the world, not exactly that which in and for itself is ungodly and sinful, but rather that which is earthly and perishable, and which may become sin to men under particular circumstances, we shall find, that in this also those first Christians manifested a resolute earnestness. They did, indeed, recognise in all earthly goods and enjoyments thankworthy gifts of love from their God, and were far removed from a haughty contempt of them ; but they were still farther removed from frivolous abuse of those goods and joys, and from that unbridled desire after them, and that eager search for pleasure which distinguished the heathen. Their love was directed to something higher and better than the vanity of perishable things, and they held fast to the apostolic rule, “ That we should rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and possess as though we possessed not, and use this world as not abusing it.” If, then, they renounced all earthly possession and enjoyment, this renunciation was more an internal than an external one, in which the soul might still grovel in the bonds of worldly lusts and desires, and therefore they always shewed themselves ready to give up and sacrifice every thing perishable and vain for the sake of heavenly things. And if some

went so far as to yield up willingly all claim to any earthly possession, and to lead a severe and continent life, in order to be able with less interruption to serve the Lord, and care for their soul's happiness, yet the teachers of the church never ceased to give earnest exhortations and warnings, in order to guard Christians from false paths and self-deceit. They shewed that such conduct can claim neither merit nor glory before God; that it was no way necessary to deny all earthly possessions and enjoyments, as things sinful in and for themselves, but that this was much rather the task, to deny the inward desire for them, and inward pleasure in them, and to overcome the love for the world in the heart, because the desire after God, and love to the Redeemer, must penetrate, inspire, and hallow the whole life of men. Thus they happily avoided the double peril of high-minded contempt, on the one hand, and frivolous worldly pleasure on the other; and the holy earnestness which manifested itself in their conduct was any thing but a dark, gloomy, misanthropic strictness; it was rather the natural consequence of a right estimation of all earthly things, and the natural expression of that heavenly frame of mind, according to which Christians considered themselves the property of Jesus Christ, and felt themselves above all things bound to live under him in his kingdom, and to serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Up to this point, my brethren, we cannot help doing full justice to the earnest mind of the first Christians, and their strictness of life; nor can we avoid confessing that the principles which they acknowledged, are those by which we ought to consider ourselves bound in our dealings with men. We, too, can all of us feel, that he who would be a Christian, must most especially deny and contend against the world within himself, that is, the sin which dwells in us by nature; and that he may not so knit his heart to the goods, the pleasures, and the enjoyments of this world, as to forget or neglect in their service the service he owes to God and Jesus Christ. This principle, without doubt, stands firm in

us all, however much many of us contradict it in their lives. But to-day, I fear, that many of us will be inclined to accuse those first Christians of an excessive earnestness, when I shew you how much farther, in the application of that principle they went, than we in our days are wont to go. Many things, for instance, which now appear to most Christians not only as innocent and unprohibited, but in which they place their highest delight and joy, appeared to those Christians in the first centuries equally worldly and sinful, were rejected and condemned in their principles and their lives. Our meditations to-day will throw a light on my meaning. And to this end, that the Lord would lend me his aid, is my earnest prayer.

TEXT. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.—1 John, ii. 15.

These, my brethren, are the same words which we took as the foundation of our last discourse, which we left incomplete, and we will therefore now proceed to continue our reflections concerning the holy earnestness which the Christians of the first centuries exhibited in their conduct, as opposed to the world; and this we will consider under two heads,—

1st, How this earnestness was manifested among them in combating every thing which was connected with heathen idolatry.

2d, How it was expressed in their conduct regarding enjoyments which they considered incompatible with the nature of Christianity.

“Prove all things, and hold fast to that which is right.”

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. “The kingdom of heaven,” says the Redeemer, “is like a lump of leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was

leavened." You doubtless understand the simile, my brethren. Christianity, entering into the old world, was, by its victorious power, to expel and dash to pieces every thing ungodly in it; and, by its hallowing influence, to remodel and ennoble every thing not entirely opposing its nature in the existing relations and institutions, and thus, in any case, to produce a new world. To that which irreconcilably opposed its nature, belonged heathen idolatry and every thing in any way connected therewith. It was necessary, accordingly, that this should be entirely destroyed, and therefore we perceive with what holy earnestness the Christians of that time fought against every thing which had the remotest connection with heathen idol worship. Among these are to be numbered offerings to idols, sacrificial feasts, and all heathen uses and ceremonies. We know how early St Paul contended against these things: "I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice," he writes to the Corinthians, "they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." The Christians, therefore, in those times, rejected with horror the demand of the heathens that they should sacrifice to their gods. They rather underwent tortures, nay, even death itself. For a foundation for their refusal to offer such sacrifices, they appealed to the principles of freedom of religion and conscience which Christianity had first called into life. "It is certainly the right of men," says Tertullian, "and belongs to the natural freedom of every one, to honour that which is according to his conviction; and the religion of one man can neither injure nor profit that of another. It is no mark of religion to wish to force religion; for religion must be received freely and without compulsion. Offerings, also, are only required out of a free heart. If you compel us to sacrifice, you will be giving nothing to your gods, for they do not desire any compulsory offerings." Gentle hearted and well-disposed magistrates some-

times attempted to persuade Christians that they need only, for appearance sake, perform the external acts demanded by the laws, and might still preserve their faith in their hearts; avaricious men, on the contrary, offered, for a stipulated sum of money, to give them testimonials of having complied with the requisite ceremonies, by which they would be ever afterwards secured against persecutions,—but nothing could move the true disciples of the Lord to accept such proposals. They considered all this, and rightly too, as a denial of their faith, and remained inaccessible to all suggestions and allurements to defection; for the declaration of the Redeemer was engraven in their hearts, “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Tertullian writes, “Many consider it madness that we should yield up our lives, when it is in our power to perform the brief act of sacrifice without giving up our inward conviction, and by this means happily to save ourselves. You give us indeed counsel how we may deceive you, but we know whence such counsels come, we know what is the motive of all this; you endeavour to shake our firmness at one time by crafty counsel, at another by furious rage.” It was thus that Christians allowed themselves to be moved by nothing to hearken unto men rather than God.

From their hatred of every thing connected with idolatry, or capable of furthering it in any way, arose the severity with which they excluded from their communion those who employed themselves in the manufacture of idols, or who, as jugglers, strove to gain a livelihood by deceiving the credulous multitudes with all kinds of pretended magical arts. If such men wished to join the church of Christ, they were obliged, before their baptism, to renounce every occupation which ministered to sin, was founded on deceit, or furthered idolatry; and if any Christian began to practise such a trade, he was forthwith expelled from the church. Many excused themselves by saying, that they did not

honour the idols, but only considered them as matters of art; but Tertullian rightly replies to an excuse savouring so much of religious coldness or indifference: "You do indeed honour idols, when you advance the honour paid to them. You do not indeed sacrifice any beast to them, but you sacrifice your own mind to them; thy sweat is their drink-offering, and thou kindlest for them the fire of thy skill." And even in the Acts of the Apostles we read how St Paul, by his preaching at Ephesus, exercised so mighty an influence, that many who had practised magical arts, such as astrology, jugglery, and the like, renounced their cheating trade for the gospel's sake, and openly burned their books.—Acts, xix. 19.

The early Christians exhibited the same earnestness when they were urged to pay idolatrous worship to the heathen emperors, to sacrifice or strew incense before their statues, to take part in the noisy and often openly dissolute amusements at the celebration of the day of their birth, or of their ascending the throne. The Christians detested this invention of the grovelling and idol-besotted heathen, and were therefore often marked out as open enemies to the state, as men who refused to give the honour due to the emperor. Tertullian defends them against this reproach, by saying, "We pray for the emperor's welfare to the eternal, true, and living God, who has given him his life and throne, and by whose power alone he stands. To Him we look up; with bared head, and uplifted hands, we pray without compulsion, from our hearts, for all emperors, that He would give them long life, a safe rule, a brave army, faithful counsellors, honest subjects, rest and peace, and whatever else man or emperor can desire." And then he continues and says, "I will call the emperor Lord, but not if I am compelled to call him so instead of the Lord my God. Otherwise I am free before him, for I have but one Lord, the almighty and eternal God, who is Lord also of the emperor." Guided by such principles, the Christians steadily refused to do any thing on the emperor's birth-day, which, however innocent,

in and for itself, yet in their mind contained in it something heathen. They, therefore, did not illuminate their houses, as was the wont at such feasts; they did not crown themselves with laurel wreaths as the heathen did; and when many thought to justify the part they took in the before-mentioned testimonies of joy and honour at the feasts of the emperor, by quoting the expression of the Redeemer, "Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's," they were met by Tertullian with this beautiful answer, "When the Lord had the coin shewn him, and asked whose image was on it, and was told 'the emperor's,' he said, 'Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's;' that is to say, give the image of the Cæsar on the coin to Cæsar, but the image of God in man to God, so that thou shouldst give the coin to Cæsar, but thyself to God." "The just man," says Clement, "is become a coin of the Lord, and has received in himself the stamp of his king." But when the known enemy to Christians, Celsus, said, "If men command thee to swear by the emperor, it is surely nothing grievous, for he has received the power upon earth. What crime is it to make the mighty our friends, since they have received their authority here below not without divine appointment?" Origen gave this forcible answer to his servile reasoning, "We must despise the friendship of men, even of princes, not only when we have to obtain it by shedding of blood, debauchery, or cruel deeds, but also when it is to be gained by sin against the Almighty God, or by one word of a slavish and low mind, such as becomes not a brave and noble-hearted man."

In how many ways, my brethren, does the holy earnestness of those first Christians shame our times? We certainly do not worship idols, we sacrifice to no false gods, as the heathens did, we honour the One true God, whom we have known through Jesus Christ as our Father. But yet, how much that is heathenish is to be found amongst us, and is suffered and advanced in the bosom of Christianity? How many sacrifices

are offered to those three idols which St John names immediately after our text, "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life?" How many Christians bow the knee to the goddess of impurity, whose scandalous temples stand open among us, and whose horrible service is established among us, and even provided with privileges? Is this not heathenism, and would not those first Christians have shrunk from such heathen customs with holy indignation? Certainly princes and nobles are not honoured among us, as were the heathen emperors, with idolatrous customs and ceremonies. We offer them the awe and obedience which belongs to them according to God's word. But does not grovelling flattery often invent for them titles which are not their due? This the holy earnestness of the first Christians could not have understood. They steadfastly fought against all blending of heathen and Christian, either in thought or deed; and no persecution, no torture, could have moved the disciples of the Lord to deny their faith, or give that honour to a man which belongs only to the most high God. O, would that this earnestness would come back among us; would that we all took to heart the warning of the apostle, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols!"

II. Let us now, in the *second* place, see how the earnestness of those first Christians was manifested in their conduct, as regarded those worldly pursuits which seemed to them irreconcilable with the nature of Christianity. Paganism bore the stamp of freshness in all life's pleasures. Licentious enjoyment and unrestrained pleasure-seeking, gave the tone to its society. Christianity, on the other hand, bore the mark of holy earnestness; and what gave it its tone was a craving for the heavenly and eternal, made gentle by the ennobling consciousness of being sons of God, by the child-like gratitude for the grace of redemption, by the joy in the Holy Ghost of a still life "hidden with Christ in God." This contrast can scarcely be shewn more clearly than in the words of a heathen, who thus expresses him-

self on this subject : “ We honour the gods with a joyous spirit, with feasts, and songs, and games, but you honour a crucified man, who rejects joy, who is pleased with fasting, who condemns enjoyment, and loves a mournful continence.”

Among the dearest pleasures of the heathen Romans are to be placed the frightful gladiatorial games, in which men fought against wild beasts and each other, for life and death. These games were a mournful proof of the corruption of human nature, and although even the most educated and noblest among the heathen never felt a scruple at taking part in them, because they were hurried away by the power of habit, and the ruling spirit of the times, yet the holy earnestness and feeling of general philanthropy, which was peculiar to the Christians, necessarily opposed these rude and barbarous sports with the greatest firmness. Irenæus calls it with horror a denial of a Christian life, when some persons did not entirely withhold themselves from taking part in those bloody games, hateful alike to God and man. Cyprian likewise expresses himself with the greatest abhorrence on this point. “ If you,” says he, “ turn your eyes to the town, they will behold an assembly far more mournful than any solitude. A gladiatorial game is being performed, in order that men’s blood may glut the sight of cruel eyes. A man is murdered for the pleasure of others, murder is turned into an art, sin is not only practised, but also taught.” There was but one voice on the subject, that it was quite unworthy Christians to be present at these horrible games, and he who, nevertheless, did attend them, was excluded from the Christian community.

But the other spectacles of that time also appeared to the Christians irreconcilable with the nature of Christianity, and many shewed that they were Christians, by forsaking the theatre at a time when a passionate regard for such pastimes reigned among the Romans. Their plays were looked upon partly as belonging to the train of idol worship, and Christians were therefore obliged to renounce them at baptism. Much

in them also was injurious to the moral feelings; and even where this was not the case, the length of time spent in this worldly amusement, the unholy spirit which ruled in the assembly, and the wild tumult of the populace, seemed scarcely to agree with the holy serenity of the Christian priesthood. The Christian considered himself a priest dedicated to God, a temple of the Holy Ghost. Every thing, therefore, which was alien to this spirit, they were bound to avoid and strive against. "God has enjoined," says Tertullian, "that the Holy Spirit, as being a kind and gentle spirit, should be sustained in peace and repose, and that we should not disquiet him by passion, fury, anger, or feelings of violent pain. How can such a spirit consist with beholding plays? For no play finishes without violently disquieting the mind. No one, when he goes to the theatre, thinks of any thing else than to see and be seen. Can a man amid the clamour of an actor think on the sayings of a prophet, or amid the melodies of a singer, raise in his spirit a psalm of prayer and praise? And if all impurity is to be detested by us, how can we dare to hear and see what we dare not speak, knowing, as we do, that every idle and foolish word is condemned of the Lord?" Thus had these Christians always before their eyes the nature of their holy calling, and the word of God served them always for a rule to judge of their duty in their different relations of life.

The heathens, indeed, judged unfavourably of this strict view of life, not unlike those at this time among ourselves who love the world, and the things that are therein. They thought that such pleasures of the eye and ear could do no injury to religion in the heart; that God would not be offended by these things; that those things which men made use of, for such pleasures, were the good gifts of God. Nay, there were not wanting even some Christians, who, cleaving to the pleasures of the world, sought all sorts of pretexts to lighten the reproaches of their conscience. You cannot, they said, point to any place of holy writ where plays are expressly forbidden. Music and dancing in

the theatre cannot contain any thing sinful, since we find, even in the Scriptures, dancing, harping, cymbals, shalms, trumpets, psalteries, and harps ; since we behold king David dancing and playing before the ark of the covenant, and since Paul, for the encouragement of Christians, draws similes even from the gladiatorial combats. Against these frivolous pedants, Tertullian remarks : “ O how wise human ignorance fancies itself to be, especially when it fears to lose any one of the joys and pleasures of the world ! Doubtless every thing is God’s gift ; but the great question is, for what end God has bestowed on us his gifts, and there is indeed a vast difference between their original intention and the sinful abuse which has proceeded from an evil and corrupt nature. Although, then, no express commandment against plays is to be found in the holy Scriptures, yet we may discover in them the general principles from which this commandment flows of itself. Whatever is said in general language against love of the world, against the lust of the flesh and of the eye, must also be applied to this particular kind of pleasure.” To those who twisted the Scriptures in the manner before mentioned, a Christian writer remarks : “ I can say with justice that it would be better for such an one not to learn the Scriptures at all, than thus to read them, for those very doctrines and examples which are there introduced, in order to arouse men to evangelical virtue, are by them perverted into a defence of sin. But, let every one only take council with himself, let every one converse only with the being which he, as a Christian, ought to present to the world, and he will never do any thing unbecoming the name of a Christian.”

If, then, being present at the performance of plays was forbidden by Christians as sinful, how much more must the calling, the profession of an actor, have appeared to them irreconcilable with the real nature of Christianity. In a North African church, an actor had become a Christian, and continued as such to instruct boys in his former art, in order by this means to earn his livelihood. Thus, Bishop Cyprian being asked whe-

ther such a person were to be suffered to continue in church communion, thus strongly declared himself against it : “ If,” said he, “ it has been forbidden men in the Scriptures to put on women’s clothes, and a curse has been pronounced against him who does so, how much more sinful must this appear, to train men by an unchaste art to effeminate, immodest gestures, and to mar God’s creation by devilish arts ! If such an one makes poverty his pretext, his wants may be supplied among the others whom the church supports, if only he can be contented with moderate but innocent food. Yet must he not believe that his forbearance from sin must be bought of him with a price : if his church be too poor to nourish him, let him come to Carthage ; here he may receive the necessaries of life, in order that he may not teach any thing to corrupt others who are *without* the church, but may himself *in* the church learn that which will bring him to everlasting life.”

Yet enough, my brethren, of the conduct of the early Christians, as regards worldly pleasures. It is impossible but that you must recognise and respect their holy earnestness, and in their earnestness you have at the same time a standard by which to judge our own age. Compare then among yourselves the views of those Christians with those that now prevail ; think on the love of theatres which is so prevalent in our days throughout all Christendom ; think on the far extended striving and hunting after worldly pleasures and sensual delights ; on the mumming and masquerading which take place among us at the approach of the holy seasons of fast, or on the eves of marriage ceremonies. Search in the holy Scriptures how such conduct agrees with the dignity of a holy Christian people ; compare past and present together, and then yourselves judge how it behoves you as Christians to walk and take to heart the earnest exhortation of the apostle, “ Love not the world, neither the things that are of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

But if you think that this is preaching to you a dark

and gloomy strictness, and depriving you of all the joys of life, I will let a father of the church, Tertullian, answer for me. He requires Christians to compare the true joys of the spirit which have come to their share by faith with those seeming joys of the world, and thus addresses them: "Tell me what else do we require than what the apostle himself asked, to depart from the world and be with Christ! There is thy joy where thy desires are gone. But wherefore art thou so ungrateful as to deem insufficient, and not to acknowledge so many great joys which have been already bestowed upon thee by the Lord? For what can give more joy than reconciliation with God the Father, and thy Lord, the revelation of truth, the knowledge of error, the forgiveness of so many past sins? What greater joys can there be than contempt of the whole world, than true liberty, than a pure conscience, an innocent life, than freedom from all fear of death? These are the joys, these the spectacles of the Christian, holy, eternal, bought without money and without price. And of what kind will that be, which no eye hath seen, no ear hath heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive?" And another Christian writer says: "No man who hath known himself as a child of God, can be astonished at the works of man's hands. That man casts himself down from the high summit of his nobility, who can admire any thing beside the Lord. Let the faithful Christian apply himself with all industry, there he will find spectacles worthy of his faith, spectacles at which even he who has lost his eye-sight can rejoice."

My soul longeth after thee, O Lord; my spirit thirsteth after God, even the living God. When shall I come into the presence of God! If I have but thee, O Lord, I ask for nothing else in heaven or earth. Nothing from the world and its vain perishable pleasures! I would gladly love thee alone, and belong to thee entirely and for ever. My joy is that I hold myself to God, that I place my reliance on the Lord Jehovah, that I proclaim all thy wondrous acts. Amen.

SERMON VIII.

THE CONDUCT OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN TIMES OF PERSECUTION.

O JESUS, thou mighty conqueror, our glorified Redeemer, do thou grant unto us such courage in our faith, and so arm us from heaven for the defence of thy truth, that, through thy divine power, we may conquer in every conflict, and remain true to thee unto death, so that we may one day receive at thy hands the everlasting crown of life. Amen.

The hymn of Luther, my brethren, which we have just sung, reminds us of persecution and conflict for the faith's sake, and this is the point which I would wish to make the subject of our meditations to-day, whilst I again direct your attention to the life of Christians in the first centuries. You know how often our Lord himself told his disciples, before the time came, that they would be the objects of hatred to a world lying in darkness and sin, and that his church only at intervals, and after hard and protracted conflicts, would obtain victory over its enemies. All that he ever said on this subject was afterwards literally fulfilled. First of all, the messengers of his gospel were most obstinately opposed and persecuted by the unbelieving Jews, but in vain. The word of God increased daily more and more, and the church of God came victorious out of every conflict. For three hundred years afterwards Christians had to suffer, almost without intermission, the most horrible persecutions from the heathen Romans. Among these their religion could not be tolerated ; for the principle of their law was this, " No one shall have pecu-

liar gods, no one shall honour new or strange gods of his own, unless they be recognised by the law of the land." Christianity, then, being a new religion, and unacknowledged by the laws, they considered themselves bound to hinder its extension by the application of external force.

Hence it came that men suspected the union of Christians of secret political purposes, fraught with danger to the state, and this the more as the earnestness was more decided, which as we have seen, they exhibited in their position as opposed to heathenism and the world. Their internal union, their confined brotherhood, made them objects of suspicion. Men could not comprehend that it was only an inward bond, the bond of faith and love, that united them. "What is the cause," they asked, "that Christians, recognising each other, as it were, by secret signs, love one another long before they can have become acquainted?" Their having neither temples, nor altars, nor statues, was considered a proof that they were united by the signs of a secret order; and men looked on their refusal to comply with heathen customs, such as strewing incense before the statues of the emperors, and swearing by their genius, as marks of a spirit of contradiction and rebellion. When, in times of public heathen popular rejoicings, they retired in silent earnestness, and would not take part in the wild and immodest sports of the multitude, they were called men that shunned the light, and complained against for taking so little interest in public affairs. In many places the most scandalous reports were spread against them, in order to rouse the fury of the populace; and all public calamities, such as famine, pestilence, and the like, were declared to be the effect of the anger of the gods, and the causes of this anger were the Christians alone.

If we consider all these things, my brethren, we must not be astonished at the persecutions which fell upon the professors of the gospel with more or less violence, and with longer or shorter intervals, under the Roman emperors. Such seasons of conflict were wholesome

times for sifting and proving the sincerity of the church. The chaff was then separated from the wheat, and whoever had not confessed the Lord from real conviction, and with an upright heart, could not abide the proof. Christians in name only consequently fell from the faith, and denied the Lord. But in general, we can point to these times of persecution as the brightest points in the history of the church of Christ, for during such seasons the full power and glory of the Christian faith in all its truth and constancy was manifested, being shewn forth by the disciples of the Lord, in the midst of the most exquisite tortures and cruelty ; and far from the truth being thereby suppressed or conquered, we see it rather expanding with irresistible power, and at last overcoming both Paganism and Judaism together. Let us then now direct our attention to this conduct of the Christians during persecution, beseeching of the Lord that he would fill us with the same spirit of fidelity, which moved them rather to suffer torture and death than to deny their Saviour, and fall from the profession of the truth ; and for this grace let us earnestly ask in silent prayer.

TEXT. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep, and to break mine heart ? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.—Acts, xxi. 13.

Paul ! thou faithful witness of the Lord, how this profession of thine shames and humiliates us ! “ Thou art ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus ; ”—and thou didst prove in act, that there was in thee a holy earnestness in this profession ; thou didst seal thy faith with thy blood, and hast obtained the crown of martyrdom ! Thou remainedst true in the conflict, and in persecutions,—faithful even unto death,—and we, alas, how often do we fall away in peace ! None persecute us, and yet how many deny the name of the Lord ; what indifference, what lukewarmness, prevails among us in our profession of

the gospel ! O, accuse us not before the throne of God,—and ye, glorious spirits of martyred Christians, who, like Paul, have fought, and like Paul have conquered ; ye faithful witnesses of the truth, whose blood the earth has drunk, accuse us not ! Pray for us, rather pray, that the Lord would give us also that spirit, which taught you to bear witness, to suffer, contend, and die for his name's sake ; that the spirit of fidelity which animated and guided you, may rest also upon us ! Yes, my brethren, with such a prayer for the spirit of faithfulness in acknowledging our Lord, in word and walk, in joy and grief, in life and death, let us proceed to our meditation ! They shall remind us of the conduct of the Christians in the first ages of the church under the persecutions which befel them ; and under this head we shall consider,

1. In general outline, the spirit which filled them in times of conflict and persecution ; and,

2. We shall adduce some instances to strengthen us in our faith.

The first head we shall consider to-day, the second on the next occasion.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth ; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. In examining the spirit which filled the first Christians in times of conflict and persecution, the feelings which animated them, and the conduct which they exhibited, we shall find, *first*, that it was marked by quietness and reflection. By this they were distinguished from those who, with wild, unbridled, fanatic zeal, rushed headlong in search of dangers, which they might, without violence to their consciences, have escaped, and who pressed unbidden into the army of martyrs. There certainly were not wanting some who waited not till the Lord handed them the cup of suffering, in order thereby to prove the truth of their belief, but with a rash and daring courage, and an enthusiastic fanaticism, gave themselves up unasked to the heathen

magistrates, and thereby brought upon themselves the pains of death. But the majority of Christians, and the teachers of the church, did not approve of such a course, but rather rejected it, as a misdirected, sinful audacity, as little agreeing with the Lord's will as with the example of himself and his apostles. And, in fact, had not the Redeemer commanded his disciples, "If they persecute you in one town, fly to another?" Did he not himself conceal himself from the plots of his enemies, so long as he had not clearly and expressly declared "that his hour was come?" Did his apostles rush hastily to martyrdom? However ready Paul expressed himself to surrender goods and blood, freedom and life, yet was he far from seeking purposely for danger and death. And thus among the first Christians, in general, a quiet, still, and thoughtful demeanour prevailed, more than the unbridled outbreak of sudden impulse. The man who followed such an impulse, and allowed himself to be hurried on by carnal, rather than spiritual, zeal, might easily fall when the danger was really at hand, and his faith was about to be proved. Thus did it happen once even to a Peter. With rash self-confidence he had vowed that he would never deny his Lord, no, not even if all his other disciples should deny him; that he would cheerfully and faithfully acknowledge him, even if he had to die with him; and, alas! we know how deeply the self-measured disciple fell! The like was the case with many Christians in time of persecution. It was not always that those men proved themselves immoveably firm and stedfast, who apparently manifested the greatest zeal in their profession of the gospel, and voluntarily delivered themselves to their enemies. The church of Smyrna, whose bishop, Polycarp, suffered martyrdom A. D. 161, mentions this in a history of a certain persecution concerning a Christian who, in this manner, hurried to martyrdom, and had notwithstanding denied the Lord, on which occurrence this remark is made: "Wherefore, dear brethren, we praise not them who give themselves up to death, for this is not the teaching of

the gospel." Clement of Alexandria says, "Genuine Christians, when God really calls them, offer themselves up joyfully, and thereby obey God's call, in that they are conscious of no headlong rashness." Bishop Cyprian of Carthage, who also died a martyr, retired for a time from his church when persecution broke in, not from fear, but because he did not wish, by his presence, to lead the heathens to greater fury. But during his absence he took the greatest care of his church, exhorted them especially to Christian moderation and quiet, and warned them from fanaticism and carnal zeal. He therefore ordered the clergy, who visited the confessors of Christ in their prisons, and administered to them the holy eucharist, to change one with another, that they might awaken no suspicion among the heathen; and he exhorted the Christians not to flock in too great numbers to their imprisoned brethren, to whom the fire of love drove them, in order that they might not at last be forbidden all access to them: "We must," he wrote, "be in all things provident, gentle, and humble; we must suit ourselves to the time and care for peace, as beseems the servants of God." He therefore disapproved of the conduct of such believers as, having been banished for their faith's sake, afterwards, of their own accord, returned to their country; "for," said he, "if they are now taken and condemned to death, they will not suffer as martyrs, but as criminals." In his last letter, shortly before his death, he wrote to his church: "Be at peace, my dearest brethren, and none of you raise disturbances, or deliver yourselves up to the heathen. If any be seized and delivered up, then he must speak, for then the Lord who dwelleth in us speaketh for us."

Thus, then, in all the persecutions which Christians suffered, the spirit of calm reflection exhibits itself everywhere in their conduct. They avoided dangers as long as it was possible; they went out of the way of death, till their Lord called them, and thus their zeal for the confession of the gospel was far, very far removed from the false zeal of those fanatical spirits, who

suffered themselves to be hurried away blindly by their roused and excited feelings into a state of wild confusion, and who determined to be persecuted, and to offer themselves as martyrs. This enthusiasm is a wild quickly blazing fire, which, if it find resistance, burns brighter for the moment, and spreads farther round,—but yet in time is extinguished, especially if it be left to itself, and not roused and excited by constant opposition from without. But the true zeal of those Christians, coupled with quiet and reflection, manifested itself as a holy and constant divine power, overmastering sufferings and death throughout three hundred years, and which at last secured the most brilliant victory to the church of Christ.

II. The spirit which animated the Christians of those first centuries under their persecutions, was also a spirit of immoveable firmness and resigned patience. The fight was indeed no easy one which they had to go through, and had they “conferred with flesh and blood,” they would either have fled in terror from the dangers which beset them, or in the midst of the battle would have laid down their arms and denied the Lord of glory, as did many, who had no true life in faith on the Son, and who were Christians merely in name. Image but for a moment to yourselves, my brethren, the heavy sufferings which they had to undergo in following their Redeemer! At one time the most fearful pains and torments, by which it was attempted to force them to fall away from the gospel; at another the tedious sufferings of a long and grievous captivity, coupled with hunger and thirst, and the weariness of hard and unwonted labour in the mines, by which the heathens expected to shake their faith and break their courage. But nothing had power to move their fidelity, or to weary out their patience. The Lord wonderfully strengthened them with power from on high, and therefore, whatever torments they were threatened with, they readily exclaimed with Paul: “We are ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

In perils and dangers, in prison and bonds, in battle with wild beasts, and at the stake, amid the most frightful torments, and with the most horrible death in view, their faith solemnized the most glorious triumph to the praise of their Redeemer, who had loved them even unto death. But far more dangerous than all tortures were the crafty temptations of the wicked one, the friendly addresses and proposals of wellwishing magistrates, who put before them means and ways of escaping all dangers easily and happily. They could, said these men, preserve their faith in their hearts, they need but for appearance sake sacrifice to the gods, and perform the acts required by the laws, and then they would be left at peace ! How near, *then*, was the danger of defection ! But although many professing Christians snatched at such means of saving their lives, true believers disdained to salve their consciences with quibbles so welcome to the flesh. They thought on what their Lord had said : “ Whosoever shall confess me before man, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven : but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven ;” and they closed their ears to such suggestions, and remained steadfast and faithful in the profession of the truth even unto death. Most difficult of all, however, must it have been to them to resist the entreaties, the tears and earnest prayers of friendship and love. Then might many a one have exclaimed with Paul : “ What mean ye to weep and break my heart !” Then was their faith indeed put to the hardest proof, when dear relatives and friends, when beloved fathers, mothers, and children, attacked them with prayers and tears, when the noblest and holiest feelings in their souls were stirred up. But they withstood even this conflict, they vanquished even this temptation, for the words of the Redeemer had sunk deeply into their hearts : “ If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

Sometimes, however, the courage of believers was strengthened and confirmed by the exhortations of their friends to firmness, patience, and fidelity; and we find examples of husbands exhorting their wives, wives their husbands, fathers their children, children their fathers, to constancy and perseverance, with the most pressing entreaties, in spite of all natural and human feelings. When the father of that great teacher of the church, Origen, was cast into prison at Alexandria, during a persecution, Origen, then a youth of sixteen years of age, burned with eagerness to acknowledge his Redeemer before the heathen. His mother knew no other means of detaining him but concealing his clothes, so that he was forced to remain at home. He then wrote his imprisoned father a letter, exhorting him to perseverance in the faith, and, among other things, exclaimed to him, “beware of swerving from thy determination for our sakes.” A Christian named Numidicus, during a fierce persecution, had encouraged many to a martyr’s death by his exhortations. He saw his wife burned to death by his side, and he himself was at last thrown half burned under a heap of stones, and left there for dead. When his daughter came to find his body, in order to bury it, she perceived in it still, to her inexpressible joy, faint signs of life. He was again restored by her unwearied care, and found many opportunities, as a preacher of the gospel, and head of a community, to labour for the extension of the kingdom of Christ Jesus.

Thus remarkable were the Christians of the first centuries for their fidelity in the faith, for their patience and constancy in acknowledging their Lord. They bore all things for his sake, they were prepared to sacrifice and give up all things for him; yea, even to suffer the most agonising death. And O, my brethren, should we not bear things far less for his sake, should we not be prepared to glorify him by denial and sacrifice of the vanities of this world, for His sake, to die to sin, and crucify the old man in us, in order to live to Him, to Him alone, and to follow him in patient obedi-

ence even unto death? Would that we could all preserve ourselves as his disciples; would that we could find the nature of the spirit which inspires us described rightly in the words of our hymn:

Him who on the cross in pain
Died for me, I truly love,
Him who rules in heaven above.
Try me, prove me, pain or pleasure,
If I faithful still remain;
Ne'er will I forsake this treasure:
Power or gold or fame may come,
Pain or grievous martyrdom,
I will ever true remain,
Him my love shall aye retain.

May God lend his aid, and of his great mercy grant that we may all be of this mind.

III. We will mention one thing more, my brethren. That which was the crown of the conduct and minds of those first Christians was their unfeigned humility and love. They well knew their human weakness, and it was therefore no confidence in their own strength, which inspired them, but confidence in the strength of Him who can and will shew forth his strength in weakness. They acknowledged with St Paul, "When I am weak, then am I strong," and therefore sought not their own honour, and their own fame, but wished only to glorify their God and their Saviour. It was from love they suffered all those pangs and tortures; and had their confession, their courage, their constancy not been a fruit and work of this love, had they sought only their own glory and honour of men, whilst they suffered so many and grievous pains, the word of the Lord would have been true of them also, "they have their reward," and the declaration of the apostle, "though I give my body to be burned, and have no charity, it profiteth me nothing. The outward confession of the Lord, even were it made amid tortures and in the prospect of death, does not in and for itself make true Christians, if it does not proceed from the spirit of love, and from a lowly heart; for love and

humility are the fairest fruits and most sure proofs of a true faith. It was of this the teachers of the church in those ages spoke continually, in order to warn Christians, especially as it sometimes happened that individual believers forgot how that it was not their own strength in which they triumphed in their conflicts with pains and torments, and thus through proud reliance on the victory of their faith, and through want of watchfulness over themselves, fell from the right path of humility and obedience, and were in danger of being overcome by the emotions of self-love. "They must learn," writes Bishop Cyprian to the Christians, "to be quiet and humble, in order to preserve the honour of his name, and after they have glorified the Lord by the confession of their lips, glorify him also by that of their lives. There remains to them more than they have done ; for it is written, ' he that endureth to the end shall be saved.' Would they would follow the example of the Lord, who in time of sorrow became not more high-minded but holier, and of his apostle who, after many captivities, and scourgings, waited in humility, and allowed himself no glorying or presumption, even when he had been caught up into the third heaven and into paradise. And since only he who humbleth himself shall be exalted, they must the more beware of their besetting adversary, since he becomes more embittered when he is conquered, and strives the more to conquer the conqueror." To the confessors themselves, the same bishop writes : " We are still in the world, we still stand on the battle-field, we still have to fight daily for our lives. Your object must be to grow and continue according to this beginning, and to take care that be perfected in you which hath been so prosperously commenced. It is still but little that we have attained something. It is more to be able to preserve what we have attained, as indeed it is not the reception, but the preservation of faith and the new birth that leads to life. Of this our Lord reminds us : ' Behold, thou art made whole, sin no more, lest

a worse thing befall thee.' Saul and many others were able to preserve the grace given unto them, as long as they walked in the way of the Lord, but when obedience left them, the grace left them also. We must tarry upon the straight and narrow way of life ; and as softness, and gentleness, and quiet, beseem all Christians, according to the word of the Lord, who looks on none but the humble and gentle, who hear his word with fear and trembling, confessors must so much the more lay this to their hearts, as they have become an example to their other brethren. Our Lord was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. And does any one who lives through him and in him, dare to exalt himself and boast, unmindful of what the Lord has done and taught. But if the servant be not greater than his Lord, those who belong to Christ must follow his footsteps, humbly, quietly, and silently ; for the humbler a man is, the more will he be exalted, saith the Lord, and whoever is the least among you shall be great."

By such humble minds and such inward love to the Lord, the Christians of the first ages in general distinguished themselves in time of persecution. These were the thoughts and feelings of martyrs, and by this spirit which animated them they overcame the world. O let us look to their example, my brethren, and follow them in this calm, constant, humble life of faith ! Let us joyfully acknowledge our Lord in word and life, and seek to be found faithful in his service, faithful in the most toilsome pains and conflicts ! We have not, as they had, to contend against persecutions, raised by men against us, to shake our courage and weaken our steadfastness in the faith ; but our own heart persecutes us with its evil lusts and desires ; a world lying in wickedness persecutes us, whilst it strives to seduce us from the right path by its false gods, and pleasure : sin persecutes us in a myriad forms. Let us " look up to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith," and in

the power of his might "run with patience the race that is set before us," and let us "watch and pray that we enter not into temptation." And if it be our duty to walk in the hard and narrow way of self-denial and sorrow, we know whither that path leads, and what a gracious reward waits us at its end. Happy he who suffers, fights and conquers with the Lord! Happy he who remains faithful to him even unto the end! He will also be raised with Him in glory. Amen.

SERMON IX.

THE CONDUCT OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS UNDER
PERSECUTIONS.

BLESS, O Lord, to our edification, the remembrance of those faithful men who sealed with their blood the confession of their faith, and grant us grace to glorify thee in our whole lives, to praise thee amid sorrows and conflicts, and remain faithful to thee even unto death, so that we may one day receive of thee the crown of everlasting life. Amen.

During the preceding week, my brethren, we have been commemorating the blessed work of the reformation during the sixteenth century. With regard even to this wonderful event the declaration of the apostle has been confirmed, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." It was a poor, weak, despised monk, Martin Luther, who, on the 31st October 1517, undertook that great work, and thereby took the field against the fearful power of the papacy. But because it was not his quarrel, but the quarrel of the Lord, that he undertook, and because he did not begin the conflict with Romish tyranny, trusting in his own power, but in firm and joyful reliance on the aid of God, he succeeded in gaining the victory for truth over falsehood and darkness, and in purifying the church from the monstrous abuses which

during the course of centuries had crept into it. The fruit of the labours, and the conflicts of that hero of the faith, and his associates, is our evangelical church, and we shew what an unspeakable blessing we, as evangelical Christians, owe to his work, when, in our Sabbath prayer, we laud and magnify God for his grace, "in that he has caused to rise upon us the bright light of his gospel, by which we may rightly know and learn of Him and His will, how we may live Christians, and die blessed."

For, my brethren, we may joyfully boast, that, in the matters of faith and conscience, we are no man's servants. However much there still remains to be desired for our evangelical church; however much she is in many respects confined, bound, and fettered, so that she cannot unfold and develope her power and her life, so as to give her full blessing to her members, free and unshackled by the strange influence of external power,—yet do we nevertheless enjoy a great and invaluable advantage, the freedom, I mean, of men's opinions in every thing which concerns their eternal health and happiness. God's word among us is not bound; it is preached free and unimpeded, and offered to every one in the Holy Scriptures, as the only rule of our faith; and so long as this word is the banner under which we gather, so long will the gates of hell not prevail against our church. Would that we, my brethren, were duly conscious of this great and invaluable blessing, and would that we never forgot what our possession of this great gift has cost, through what conflicts the truth at last obtained the victory, and how our pious forefathers cheerfully sacrificed wealth and life to obtain for us this precious treasure, and hand it down to us as our inheritance. Then should we before all things take to heart that earnest exhortation, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown!" Then should we not be so lukewarm and indifferent in the employment, application, and preservation, of those glorious goods, which the heroes of the faith in the sixteenth

century won for us; then should we, like our fathers, prove ourselves, even amid conflicts and sorrows, faithful in the profession of evangelical truth.

Would that I could rouse you, my brethren, this day to such fidelity in the profession of your faith. And what means can I employ more calculated to promote this end, than leading you back into the earliest times of the church of Jesus Christ, and reminding you of the example of the Christian martyrs in the first centuries, who, for the gospel's sake, joyfully endured tortures and death! Their watchword was the apostle's declaration, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus." On the last occasion I depicted to you in general terms the spirit which inspired them amid trials and persecutions, and you will remember that I described it as a spirit of rest and reflection, of faithfulness and constancy, of lowliness and love. Allow me to-day to continue and conclude the consideration I have commenced, by adducing a few individual instances, out of the vast number of those who faithfully acknowledged their Lord, in order to strengthen your faith, and arouse you to a similar fidelity in the service of our adorable Lord and Saviour; and let us pray that God may engraft these thoughts in our hearts.

TEXT. Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trials of cruel mockings, and scourgings, yea moreover, of bonds, and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, and tor-

mented: (of whom the world was not worthy) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.—Hebrews, xi. 33–38.

You see, my brethen, that Israel,—for my text speaks of the prophets of Israel and its heroes of the faith,—has had its martyrs, who, in the time of the old covenant, fought valiantly for the faith of their fathers, and refused not for that faith's sake to undergo the most exquisite tortures, and the most frightful death. "They would accept no deliverance," that is, they desired not to be delivered from bonds, tortures, and death, because they could only have obtained it by denying their God and their holy law. They therefore preferred to sacrifice their earthly life in order to obtain a resurrection which is better, as it leads to an eternally happy life, and to heavenly glory. And those who escaped a martyr's death had to lead a martyr's life. The world repelled them from itself, for "the world was not worthy of them;" and they had to contend against nameless misery, against want and penury, against trouble and distress of every kind. But they remained "faithful unto death," and there the conqueror's crown encircles their brows. The church of Jesus Christ has many such martyrs to point to. In the first centuries, in particular, when the most frightful persecutions burst upon the professors of the gospel, there were not wanting true men to bear witness to and contend for the truth, who, for the name of the Lord Jesus, cheerfully endured mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonment, misery and distress; who were stoned and sawn asunder, thrown to wild beasts, slain by fire and sword. It was their watchword, too, to suffer themselves to be tortured to death, and to receive no deliverance, no ransom, in order to attain to a better resurrection. Alas, how must this heroism, this fidelity to the faith of those Christian warriors, shame us! But this shame may be made profitable to us, my brethren. It may induce and arouse us to emulation; wherefore let us this day select some of the number of those Christian martyrs,

and remember that we ought to behold their end, and follow their faith.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth ; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. Scarcely had the church been founded by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and scarcely had the apostles of our Lord commenced, at his command, to preach the gospel, when their trials and persecutions began. And among these trials and persecutions the truth did not want courageous champions, distinguished heroes of the faith, and invincibly faithful witnesses even unto blood. Stephen, who was stoned, commenced the list ; James, who was slain with the sword, followed after him ; and in the footsteps of these two followed many of the disciples, whose names, indeed, we do not know, but whose trials and conflicts are noticed in the Holy Scriptures. And the farther the gospel spread, the more frequent and the more violent became the persecutions. Great and heavy sorrows and trials fell upon the believers in the Lord, especially under the Roman emperors, until the third century. The first fearful persecution burst out under the emperor Nero, in the year 64 after our Lord's birth. History has branded him as an inhuman monster, and such he certainly shewed himself to the Christians. At his command they were executed with the most exquisite tortures, crucified, thrown to wild beasts, or sewn up in the hides of animals, and given to be torn to pieces by dogs. They even planned horrors more inhuman than these ; they steeped their clothes in wax and other combustible materials, and then set light to them, that they might serve to illuminate the night. There they stood, those witnesses of the faith, and their burning bodies, like torches, illumined the darkness ; but more brightly still burned their spirits with fiery love to their Lord, whom they would not deny, and the light of their faith has spread its glorious beams over all ages. But it is impossible to relate to you every particular of

the history of the persecutions of Christians. I can only direct your attention to some of the most approved heroes of the faith ; and I will first call your attention to the venerable bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, in whose conduct, quiet patience, and calm resignation to God's will are peculiarly exemplified. In the last half of the second century, under the emperor Marcus Aurelius, being then an old man aged nearly ninety years, he ended his life in a glorious martyrdom, of which a particular account has been preserved, and handed down to us. When the officers came to seize his person, he said resignedly, " the Lord's will be done !" and received his persecutors with the friendly demeanour, and the mildness, which he had learned in the school of his gentle and lowly Saviour. He then prepared himself for his last expedition with a prayer so full of zeal and earnestness, that even the heathens were struck and moved by it. When led before the magistrates, he cheerfully gave account of his faith ; and when the Roman deputy required of him to swear by the emperor, and curse Christ, he repelled the demand with the most decided firmness, and replied with the deepest love to his Redeemer, " Eighty years and six have I served him, and he has never caused me any sorrow ; how shall I then curse my king who hath made me happy ? " The deputy, who would willingly have saved the pious old man, continued urgently to press him, but Polycarp remained immoveable, and as steadfastly refused to defend himself before the people. At last the enraged judge exclaimed, " I have wild beasts ! " " Let them come," replied the martyr with dignified calmness. " We have fire," cried another. " Thou threatenest," said the aged hero, " with a fire which burns but for a few moments, but thou knowest nothing of the judgment to come, and that eternal fire which will consume the ungodly. But why delayest thou ? Do as it pleaseth thee ! " As he thus spake, his countenance beamed with confidence and joy, so as to throw even his judges into visible embarrassment. At last it was publicly declared, " Polycarp has confessed

himself to be a Christian," and therein the sentence of death was pronounced. The heathen multitude cried out furiously, "This is the teacher of ungodliness, the father of the Christians, the enemy of our gods, who teaches so many not to pray to our gods, and not to sacrifice to them!" He was condemned to the flames, and when they wished to nail him to the stake, he said, "Leave me as I am. He who hath given me strength to endure the fire, will also give me strength to stand firm upon the pile." Before the fire was kindled he prayed: "O Lord, almighty God, Father of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of thee, God of angels, and of the whole creation, of the whole human race, and of the just, who live in the light of thy countenance, I thank thee that thou hast thought me worthy of this day and of this hour, that I should be one of the number of thy martyrs, and drink of the cup of thine anointed." Thus died this true believer, a disciple of the apostle John, and his death strengthened the church in their faith and fidelity. With the same quietness and resignation suffered,

II. Bishop Cyprian of Carthage, under the emperor Valerian, in that organised and well known persecution that burst upon the Christians in the year 257. When called on to honour the gods, he answered with a noble openness, "I am a Christian and a bishop; I know no other gods than the one true God, who made heaven and earth, and sea, and all that is therein. This God we Christians serve, and to him we pray day and night for all men, and also for the emperor." When he refused to recall and deny what he had said, he was banished; for the intention then was only to separate the bishops and teachers from their flocks. Many other Christians, even women and children, were at the same time, after having been maltreated with scourges, condemned to prison, or to labour in the mines. These Cyprian comforted from the place of his exile with his spirit-stirring epistles, and in every way provided for

their bodily and spiritual refreshment. "In the mines," he wrote to them, "the body will not be refreshed by beds and couches, but by the comfort and the love of Christ. The tired limbs rest indeed on the hard ground, but it is no punishment to be there with Christ. The outer man is there begrimed with filth, but the inner man is by so much the more washed and purified by the Spirit of God. There you have not clothes enough to keep out the cold, but he who hath put on Christ hath clothes and adornment enough. And even though you cannot celebrate the Lord's Supper, yet, my dearest brethren, your faith need experience no want. You celebrate the most glorious supper, you offer to God the most costly sacrifice, for the holy Scripture says, that a broken and a contrite heart is well pleasing unto God. You offer yourselves to God as holy and pure offerings." How pious a mind, how high and strong a faith, is shewn in these words! Nor did this faithful servant of Jesus Christ lose this power of faith when he himself was a victim of persecution. He was indeed soon recalled out of his banishment to Carthage. But very shortly afterwards tidings from Rome announced the last and fiercest outbreaks of the fury of the persecution under the emperor Valerian. Cyprian now looks forward daily to his death. His followers press on him to fly, but all in vain. He had done so once before, because the good of his church required it. He now determined to glorify the Lord before his flock by a good profession. He was suddenly hurried away by a guard sent for that purpose by the Roman deputy; but as the deputy was at that time at his country house, the hearing of the cause was deferred. Cyprian therefore remained the night through in careful custody, and was kindly treated by his guards. A great part of his flock, who had heard that their spiritual father was about to be executed, hurried to the spot, and staid all night around the house which contained their beloved shepherd, that nothing might happen to him without their knowledge. The next morning he was led, accompanied by a vast throng of Christians and heathens, to the judgment-hall.

As the deputy had not yet arrived, he was obliged to stay in a part of the hall by himself. Weary and dropping with perspiration, he sat down on a bench, and while there, a soldier who had fallen away from the faith offered him dry clothes. "Shall I," answered Cyprian, "seek to be released from an inconvenience which, in a few minutes more, I shall probably no longer feel?" When he appeared at last before the deputy, the latter thus addressed him, "The emperor's majesty commands thee to perform the ceremonies of the state religion!" "That I cannot do," was his answer. "Bethink thee of thy life," said the deputy to him. "Do what is commanded thee," replied the bishop; "in so just a matter I have nothing to bethink myself of. I pray to my God, and fly to him with a zealous earnestness of spirit, for the sorrows of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." The sentence was then pronounced, that he should be executed with the sword. "Praised be God," was his exclamation when he heard his sentence, and the pious champion of the faith departed praying from the church militant to the church triumphant.

III. As the before-mentioned martyrs awaited death for the Lord's sake, with a calm and resigned spirit, so also may we behold the fiery soul of Ignatius hastening to the glories of the world to come with burning desire. He was bishop of the Church of Antioch, and died a martyr in the year 116, during the persecution instituted against the Christians by the emperor Trajan. A beautiful testimony concerning him is preserved from antiquity. "He was," runs the tradition of him, "a man in all things like the apostles; he was like a divine light which filled the hearts of believers with light and comfort by his doctrine and writing." When the emperor Trajan came to Antioch, Ignatius was brought before him, and made before him a noble confession, which drew down on him the sentence, that he was to be brought bound to Rome, and there, for the

gratification of the people, to be exposed to wild beasts. Ignatius heard this decision with extreme joy: he longed "to depart and be with Christ:" he longed for the grace of martyrdom, and the crown of eternal life. In his long journey to Rome he had to undergo unspeakable distresses, but his Lord strengthened him with power from on high, and in all troubles, "he was more than conqueror through Him who loved us." On the way he wrote to the Roman church, and his epistle was the expression of his hearty love to the Redeemer, for whom he was prepared cheerfully to lay down his life. "Pray for me," he writes, "pray for inward and outward strength, that I may not only call myself Christian, but also be found one in very deed." When arrived at Rome, he was handed over to the prætor, and a few days afterwards glorified the Lord by his death. He went to the judgment-hall accompanied by many brethren; he asked and obtained permission to pray with them. His last prayer was, that it would please the Lord to put an end to the persecution, and to preserve love and unity among the brethren. In the meantime the wild beasts were expecting their prey with craving hunger. The martyr was thrown to them, and in a few minutes torn to pieces and devoured.

IV. Your sex, too, Christian women, can point to champions of the faith in those days, whose fidelity and steadfastness may serve as a pattern to us all. As that mother in Israel, in the days of the Maccabees, who saw her seven children die a death of torture, and then herself with cheerful reliance suffered the torments of a martyr's death, stood high above all champions of the faith by her invincible steadfastness and firmness, so among Christian martyrs a rival is sought in vain to the young Perpetua, a girl of twenty-two years of age. In a hot persecution which broke out in Carthage under the emperor Septimus Severus, she with several other women was seized. She had a child who was left with her in the prison, and whom she herself

joyfully suckled. When the report spread that she was about to be tried, her aged father, who was a heathen, came sorrowfully to her in prison and said, "Dear daughter, have pity on my grey hairs. Have pity on thy father, if I deserve to be called father by thee. Bring not shame and dishonour upon me. Think on thy brothers, thy mother, thy foster-mother, thy infant, which, if thou diest, cannot live. Dismiss thy high determination, unless thou wilt plunge us all into destruction, for none of us will dare to speak freely, if thou sufferest anything." With that he kissed her hands, and threw himself at her feet. "I sorrowed," says Perpetua in her own narration, "over the grey hairs of my father; I sought to comfort him and said, when I stand before the judgment-seat, that, which God wills, will happen to me, for we stand not in our own power but in God's." When she, with the other captive Christians, came to be heard, and the turn had come to her, her old father stepped suddenly forward with the infant in his arms and said, "Pity thy father, have mercy on thy babe, sacrifice for the emperor's welfare." "That I cannot do," she answered with courageous firmness. The judge then asked her, "Art thou a Christian?" and she replied "I am." When her father would have urged her more, the judge ordered him to be driven away by force, and the rude soldiers struck the unhappy old man. "It grieved me," says Perpetua, "as though I had been struck myself; so sorrowful was I at the misery of his old age." She was now condemned with her companions, three youths and another young woman named Felicitas, to be thrown to the wild beasts at a show that was to be given to gratify the people on the occasion of the birth-day of the young imperial prince. Shortly before the execution, her old father came to her for the last time into the prison, plucked out the hair of his beard, threw himself to the ground, and spoke, as Perpetua expresses it, words that must have moved every creature. But however deeply this scene affected her, however great her sorrow and distress, her faith nevertheless conquered every grief, and

she continued firm to the end in the love of her Redeemer.

On the day of her victory, she entered singing with the companions of her sorrows, and after they had been scourged, the beast fight began. When Perpetua was already wounded, she caused to come to her her brother, and a catechumen who had done her much service during her tribulation, and said to them: "Stand firm in the faith, and love one another, and be not afflicted at our sufferings." At last the time came to the already mortally wounded believers the accustomed *coup de grace*, that is, to kill them with the sword. At the point of death, they gave one another the kiss of peace, with which Christians were wont to seal every service of God, and when this was done, Perpetua was perfected, that she might receive the crown of life at the hand of Him to whom she had been faithful even unto death.

The time would fail me, my brethren, were I to attempt to relate to you all the instances of heroic courage and steadfastness in the faith, which the history of the martyrs of the Christian church would supply me with. Thousands have given over their lives unto death, and streams of blood have flowed for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus; and never has the church shone with greater glory, than in those times of conflict and persecution, when her members dwelt in constant danger of death. But later times also have their martyrs to point to; and alas! this is the most sorrowful and deserving of all our grief, that here the persecutions have proceeded from a dismembered church, that here Christians have raged against Christians, and trampled cruelly under foot the holy laws of freedom of faith and conscience. What a reckoning in this matter has the papal chair at Rome to give! Think only of the fearful trials of heretics, the horrors of the Inquisition, especially in Spain, on the Parisian massacre, on the persecutions of the Waldenses, on the end of that pious witness to the faith, John Huss, who was burned at Costnitz, on account of his belief, and on the

grievous conflicts and sufferings of the reformers of the sixteenth century. Our Luther, indeed, was not called to glorify the Lord by a bloody death, but had he fallen into the hands of our opponents, he would doubtless have hardly succeeded in escaping the stake, and the martyr's crown would certainly have adorned his brow. But he was undoubtedly prepared to die for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus, as he indeed had suffered in his service disgrace and scorn, and crosses, and tribulations of all kind without shrinking or quailing.

All these champions of the faith are now celebrating their feast of victory in the triumphant, glorified, heavenly church. In the Jerusalem which is there above, their hymns of thanksgiving and praise echo to the glory of Him who strengthened his saints through the power of his mercy, so that they obtained the victory. Sorrow is to them changed into glory, and from the short sowing in tears has sprung up an eternal reaping in joy. We say with St James, "Behold, we count them happy which endure;" yes, happy everywhere are the true believers in the Lord, who desired no deliverance, who sought not to be freed from earthly sorrows and torments, because they sought for a better resurrection, the inheritance of eternal life.

"They have finished their course, they have fought a good fight, they have kept the faith." But we, my brethren, are still standing on the field of battle. O would that those patterns of faith and truth would encourage and strengthen us, to wait on unto the end steadfast and immoveable in the profession of holy, evangelical truth; for it is not for our amusement that we call to mind those heroes of the faith of earlier times, but that we may learn from them and suffer ourselves to be led on by their examples, like them to "run with patience," like them to "fight the good fight," and, like them, to be faithful in the faith even unto death. We indeed are not threatened with prison and captivity on account of our profession; but, alas! would that the world did not take us captive in its dangerous toils; would that we did not allow sin to cast

us into its disgraceful chains ! We need to fear no stake, no flames, for our faith's sake ; but, O ! would that we were not scorched by the fire of ungodly lusts and desires ! No power, no violence of men compels us now to deny our faith ; but, O ! that we did not deny it, torn asunder by the might of sinful passions, which rage in our hearts ! Yes we have also to fight a holy fight, in order to preserve the treasure of our faith, the fight against ourselves, against the seductions of the world, against the temptations of sin, against the coolness, the indifference, the ruinous tendencies of our time. O ! let us watch and pray, and courageously strive and fight that no one take our crown from us ! O ! let us but remain true, and walk steadfastly following our Lord, that we too may one day receive at his hands the crown of righteousness, which he on that day will give to all who love his appearance. Amen.

SERMON X.

THE CONDUCT OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS IN THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS WORLD.

O LORD, if it please thee to lay upon us crosses and sufferings in thy service, lend us also the strength to bear them with patience, to the glory of thy name, and help us that we may always pray, with childlike resignation to thy counsels, "Thy will be done;" do thou direct our looks, as we bear our cross, to the glories of the world to come, and let the comfort which thy holy word gives us be strong within us, when it proclaims to us that "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." And if there be any among us bowed down with sorrow, do thou, O Lord Jesus, raise up their broken spirits; for thou hast said, "Come unto me all ye that travail and are heavy laden and I will refresh you." Amen.

Our life upon earth, my brethren, does not pass without crosses and sorrows. Although it be but a span of time which lies between the cradle and the grave, yet no one in this short life is free from trouble and labour, care and conflict, need and tribulation. Even the purest piety is no protection against it; and it were a foolish madness for any one to suppose, that, in following Jesus Christ, he will be spared from all sorrow. Has not the Lord himself made this declaration, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." And St Paul expressly declares, that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God." And St Peter reminds

Christians, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." In like manner, St James writes, "My brethren count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." And in one of our church hymns we sing,

"Upon the cross were we redeemed,
The cross the Christian's mark shall be."

Neither would it be good if all were sunshine. Tempests, storm, and rain, are frequently both necessary and beneficent; and who knows whether more true Christians are not formed in the school of the cross, than in the school of good fortune and happiness, and whether we shall not, throughout eternity, thank God more for the sorrows by which he has drawn us to himself, than for the pleasures which we have here enjoyed, and which so easily draw aside weak and sinful men from the one thing needful, and entangle them in the toils of worldliness.

Moreover, sorrows are a precious touchstone to prove our faith, our love, our hope. How many a one flatters himself that he is a true Christian, and that he stands firm in the faith. He cleaves externally to the Lord and his church. He honours and loves his word, hears it willingly and industriously, and walks in all honesty before the world. But things go well with him, he has no necessities, no sorrows; no sacrifice is required from him, and with joyful heart he sings with the church,

"All that God does is just and good."

With such consolation he comforts others who are compelled to suffer many things. But suddenly the star of his fortune sinks; now the cross is laid upon him, and now it is plainly shewn that his faith was nothing but the work of the lips. In the time of temptation he falleth away. He begins to doubt, he is discontented with God, murmurs against his holy guidance, and no word of comfort will enter into his heart. Yes, my brethren, it is easier to be a Christian in good days than in evil

days ; but it is in the fiery furnace of tribulation that it is shewn whether we are upright and in earnest with our Christianity. When the Lord was bound and in captivity his disciples forsook him and fled, and Peter denied him. They were yet too weak, too little grounded in the faith, to follow him on the path of the cross. And yet then only are we his true disciples when we share the cross with him, and refuse not to sacrifice and endure all things for his sake.

This our own strength cannot indeed accomplish, my brethren. Grace alone can work such a mind in us, and this is a certain proof that we are actually filled and worked upon by grace when we forsake not the Lord, in crosses and sorrow, but can exclaim joyfully with St Paul, "In all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." O would that this were our mind, and would that our conduct in time of trouble proved that the grace of God was not given us in vain ! What a cheering example on this head also have we in the Christians of the first centuries of the church ! What a high and heavenly mind is expressed in their conduct, whether in their own or in others' sorrows ! Let us again to-day turn our eyes towards them, and again learn from them ; and let us in silent prayer ask of the Lord to bless to this end our meditation which we are now about to enter upon.

TEXT. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience ; and patience experience ; and experience hope : and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.—Romans v. 3-5.

See, my brethren, thus does a Christian mind express itself in tribulations, crosses, and sorrows of this time, and thus do all true Christians at all times, and in all places, bear witness with St Paul, that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," which they have received. The Christians also of the

first centuries were not deficient in this mind, and it is their example which we would this day hold forward for your imitation. Let us then see,

1. How they bore themselves in sorrow and tribulation ; and,

2. Wherein their conduct had its foundation.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth ; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. Flesh and blood can never become reconciled with crosses and sufferings, my brethren. The natural man always struggles against them, and that may be said of him which the gospel history says of Simon of Cyrene, “ they *compelled* him to bear the cross.” And if we look to the impression which it makes upon his heart, we shall always find, that it either depresses him with fearful doubts or entire loss of courage, or else he contends against it with haughty defiance and unfeeling apathy, while he seeks to harden himself against its pangs by plunging headlong into the vortex of worldly pleasures, and sensual enjoyments. Not so true Christians bear themselves, Christians hallowed and enlightened by the spirit of God. This a Paul teaches us, whom we hear bearing witness with pious enthusiasm, “ we glory in tribulations also.” O how glorious is the grace in him ! He feels indeed the pain ; he feels indeed the sorrows which oppress him ; he feels indeed shaken, when the storms of life break in upon him from every side,—but he doubts not,—they cannot break his courage. He has received the power to overcome them ; his is the grace, when overwhelmed by tribulations, to raise an exulting hallelujah, to pour forth laud and praise in prison, and in bonds, and to thank God for that cross, under the weight of which countless numbers murmur and complain. Such thoughts were in those beaten and scourged disciples of whom we read, that “ they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.” And how the Christians

of the first centuries in this regard trod in the footsteps of the apostles, is sufficiently exemplified, among others, by that pious old man, of whose martyrdom we spoke to you in our last discourse, Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna, who, even when dying, praised God that he had thought him worthy to drink of the cup of his anointed.

But where the natural feelings of men are so enlightened and sanctified by the power of grace, that they can even glory in tribulations, those tribulations themselves must appear to him to be things wholesome and benevolent. That man must have perceived that the cross is to him no punishment, no expression of divine wrath, but a necessary means of examination and proof, whose holy and blessed purpose is none other than to build him up to greater perfectness in his communion with his Redeemer, to lead him nearer to God, and to prepare him for glory. If calamity appeared to him to be the mysterious working of the avenging justice of God, as is always the case with the natural man, the sinner, it would press him to the earth, and his anguish at the wrath of God would terrify him; but as he knows that "he has peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ," who has expiated and taken away his sins, and because he has boldness to say, "The cross which the Lord lays upon me is needful, and must not be absent, if I am ever to be saved; it is a wholesome means which my wise and merciful heavenly Father makes use of in order to train me for his heaven," then, indeed, will tribulation work in him patience, and he will pray silently and resignedly, with his divine Redeemer, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but thine be done?" With a steadfast and pious resignation to His counsels he bears his cross, with the eye of faith fixed on Him who bore the cross so willingly for him, and by this firmness and patience proves himself a disciple of Him who "became obedient even unto death;" for "patience worketh experience," says our text, that is, the Christian is proved by patience, and preserved in his faith and love to-

wards his Redeemer. You know, my brethren, how that the holy apostles were preserved in such a manner, how they endured in all faithfulness to their Redeemer, in despite of all temptations and conflicts, and how they valued it as an honour to follow Him on the path of the cross, and to walk in fellowship with his sufferings. And no less patient and resigned, steadfast and immoveable, were the Christians of the first centuries of our church. It seemed to them a thing nowise strange, that they had to endure so many sufferings and conflicts in the service of the Redeemer. They considered it their calling here to suffer with the Lord, and prove themselves his true disciples by courageous endurance and steadfastness in following him. For they had not joined themselves to the Lord, in order to enjoy this world's goods together with Him, but in order to be made worthy of the heavenly goods, blessings, and joys of his kingdom. Earthly advantages and external good fortune were not to be reckoned on in the profession of Christianity, much rather was it needful that every one who entered the church of Jesus Christ should suffer tribulation; and they who came to the Lord in a mercenary spirit, and hoped to have good and comfortable days in His service, found themselves bitterly disappointed in their expectations. "As if a Christian believed," says Bishop Cyprian, with regard to such earthly minded men, "in order to enjoy the pleasures of the world free from all evils of this time, and not rather in order to enter out of all the sufferings of this world into the blessedness of the world to come. What is there, then, in this world, that is not common to us with all other men, as long as we, after the law of natural generation, have this mortal body in common with them? As long as we live in this world, we share this corporeal nature with all the rest of mankind, and it is only according to the spirit that we are distinct from them. Indeed, if the Christian knows and holds firmly to those conditions under which he became a believer, he will be aware that he has to combat, even more than others, with the sorrows of this life." In like manner, the

teachers of the church expressed themselves to the heathen, who were wont to reproach the Christians, that they had, through their faith, no advantage over them, since they were subject to the same sorrows. And they particularly adduced this, that their advantage did not consist in their being removed beyond the reach of all earthly sorrow, but in this, that, according to their inward life, they were exalted far above these sorrows, and were distinguished from the heathen by their patient and courageous deportment under every cross, through the power of the spirit that dwelt in them. "He," says Cyprian, "whose whole joy and happiness is in the world, and whose pleasure entirely ceases with this life, considers all the misfortunes of this world as punishments. But those whose hope is set on future goods, find no pain in the sorrows of this time. We Christians, who live more in the spirit than in the flesh, conquer the weakness of the body by the power of the soul. We know and believe that we are only proved and strengthened by that which pains and distresses you. Or, do you think, that we bear pain in the same way as you do, seeing how different is our deportment under it from yours? With you there is an ever weeping and wailing impatience, with us a pious and steadfast resignation, which is ever calm and thankful towards God; ours is a resignation which appropriates to itself no pleasure or pain here below, but quietly and humbly awaits, amid all the storms of life, the approach of the time for the fulfilment of the divine promises. We, who are newly created and born again in the spirit, who live no longer to the world but to God, shall only then obtain God's gifts and promises when we come to Him. And yet we pray day and night to be preserved from enemies, for rain, for the removing or lessening of misfortune, for peace, and also for your welfare."

Behold, then, in the deportment of the first Christians, a confirmation of the truth announced in our text, "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience." But the more gloriously a truly Christian mind is shewn amid conflicts and sorrows, the more lively

and the stronger becomes therewith in their minds the hope of the future life, as St Paul says, "Experience worketh hope, and hope maketh not ashamed." The Christian knows whereunto he is called. "Where I am," the Lord hath promised, "there shall my servants be also." He will therefore follow his Redeemer into glory. Accordingly his eye is not fixed on things earthly and perishable, he directs his glance above, and his heart longs for the goods and enjoyments of the world to come; and this longing increases in the same proportion as the Christian becomes aware how unsatisfactory and vain all earthly enjoyments and goods really are. It is the strongest and most lively amid the conflicts and trials of this time. Nothing then comforts and raises him so much as the hope one day to be with the Lord, and to take part in the imperishable joys and glory of eternal life. In this hope he endures patiently every cross; by this hope he conquers every pain; this hope teaches him to depart joyfully from the world. "For I reckon," he cries in triumph, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us hereafter." "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

It was, then, my brethren, the sight of this glory, which so highly inspired the first Christians, that they cheerfully, for the Lord's sake, suffered sorrows and death. They saw, like Stephen, "the heavens open, and Christ standing at the right hand of God;" they saw him extending to them the crown of life, and nothing could make them waver in their fidelity. While the heathen, whose whole happiness consisted in sensual enjoyments, gave themselves up to comfortless sorrow under the afflictions of this time, and could only weep and moan over the want of durability of all things, the faith and hope of Christians solemnized their most glori-

ous triumph when earthly things were taken from them, and they felt called to follow their Redeemer in bearing their cross ; for they thought on his word, “ Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory ?” And they felt mightily strengthened by the word of the apostle, “ Blessed is the man that endureth temptation ; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” Thus, raised by their faith and hope above the pains and sorrows of this time, they could celebrate joyful feasts when all around them were mourning. A touching instance of this conduct of the first Christians in great calamity, remains to us in a beautiful document written in the third century by Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria, in such a time of affliction to the Egyptian churches. Persecution and civil war had been raging, and a devastating pestilence had ensued. When, during this season, Dionysius invited the Egyptian churches to the celebration of the approaching Easter, he thus wrote : “ This cannot, indeed, appear to other men to be an appropriate season for the celebration of a feast, for now all are mourning. We can hear only wailing throughout the town, by reason of the multitudes of the dead and dying. Much that is terrible has also previously occurred. First of all we were persecuted, but although we alone were persecuted and murdered by all, yet even then we celebrated our feast. Every place of suffering became to us a place of festive assembly, the open fields, the solitudes, the ships, the inns, the prisons ; and the perfected martyrs, who had attained the festive joys of heaven, were enabled to celebrate the most glorious feast. After the persecution, war and famine came upon us,—sufferings which we had to endure together with the heathen. But even then we enjoyed again the peace of Christ, which he alone bestowed upon us. Scarcely had we respired for a short space, when a pestilence broke out, a thing most fearful and terrible for the heathen, but for us an especial exercise and trial of faith. Very many of our brethren who, from the greatest love to their

neighbours and brethren, spared not themselves, in order to provide for the sick, yielded up their lives cheerfully with them. And those who closed the mouth and eyes of the dying Christians, and carefully laid out the departed, soon followed them to the grave. Quite otherwise was it with the heathen. They drove away their sick from them, cast the half-dead into the streets, and fled from those who were dearest to them, because they feared the extension of the disorder, which, however, with all their efforts they could hardly avoid."

II. If we now inquire, my brethren, what it was that made the believers in the Lord so patient and resigned amid all the sorrows of this time, so courageous and firm, so cheerful and joyous, the apostle points out the foundation of this demeanour in the words of our text, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." The apostle speaks not here of our love to God, but of God's love to us, the greatness and glory of which has been revealed to us in Christ Jesus. For "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for it, that whoso believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To this love we owe our redemption, our justification, the blessing of being children of God, eternal life and eternal blessedness; and when the sinner receives the grace of God in Christ with faith, the love of God gushes like a stream into his heart, and its effect is that peace which the world knoweth not, and cannot give. The sinner is now no longer separated from his God; he stands near to him, he belongs to him, he is inwardly and indissolubly united to him, he has received the right of a son, God has become his Father, and being assured of the grace that is given him by the Holy Spirit, he exclaims joyfully, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus."

And now, my brethren, ask not any longer whence proceeds in true Christians that stillness, that patience, that resignation, that steadfastness, that faithfulness, that obedience, that joy, that hope, that most blessed confidence, which shine forth in them in the most grievous and severest trials and sufferings of this world! O, they have believed and known that God is love—and therefore they know,

“ That nought to us is given
Which floweth not from heaven,
Which will not work for good.”

Therefore every cross seems to them a blessing, for the God of love cannot do otherwise than bless; the father cannot wish ought else than what is best for his children. In all things, therefore, they submit to his will, and if he give them the bitter cup of sorrow to drink, they do not push it from them, for they know that it is good for them to drink it. Contentedly and thankfully they receive all things from his hand, joy and grief, happiness and tribulation, for all things are intended for their good, and, mindful of the sufferings which the Saviour endured for us, and of the glory which he has prepared for them that believe in Him, they murmur not that they must bear the cross, as he did before them, because it is his will to lead them by the cross into glory. This, therefore, is and remains their watchword,

“ He who with Christ is here defied,
Shall there with Christ be crowned;
He who with Christ is crucified
Shall there in joys abound.”

By this they experience daily what St Paul testifies, that, “ as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.”

Learn, therefore, my brethren, to believe,—to believe in the love of God in Christ Jesus,—and you will suffer patiently, fight courageously, and in all your troubles be happy conquerors. Yes! if you are compelled to suffer yourselves, you will be enabled to comfort others, and in love to succour those on whom the Lord hath laid

the cross, for, when "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," our hearts embrace all mankind in love, and we would impart to all the salvation of which we partake. We should not, therefore, remain thus cold and indifferent to the sorrows of others, we should not live without taking part with those who weep and mourn, but we should comfort them with the comfort with which we ourselves were comforted, and seek to soothe their troubles by our kindness. Such a loving, hearty participation in each other's woes and sorrows, did the early Christians manifest; and especially did it seem to them a holy duty to comfort and strengthen those who had to suffer crosses and persecutions for the faith's sake. They did not care solely for their bodily refreshment, they considered it part of their duty to refresh them spiritually. They visited the captive, they prayed with them, they gave them the holy eucharist, and turned their prisons into churches. Tertullian sent a letter of comfort to the believers who were languishing in prison at Carthage, which thus begins: "If, in this time of sorrow, both the church, your mother, and also individual brethren, refresh your bodies, do ye also receive from me spiritual nourishment, for it is not fit that the body should be satisfied and the spirit famish." He then thus proceeds with comfort and exhortation: "Before all things vex not the Holy Spirit, which hath entered with you into prison, for had he not been with you, you would not now have been there. See to it now, that he may still continue to dwell with you, and lead you thence to the Lord. A prison is, indeed, also a residence of the evil spirit, where he gathers together his own; but you have *therefore* entered into the prison, to conquer him in his own habitation. A prison is, indeed, dark, but you are light; it has fetters, but you are free before the Lord. Let us compare life in the world with life in a prison, and see whether the spirit does not gain more in a prison than the flesh loses. The spirit obtains that which can increase faith. Thou beholdest no idols; thou meetest with none of their

images ; thou needest not to take any part in heathen feasts, by reason of living among them ; thou art not persecuted by the smell of offerings ; thou hearest not the cries of those who solemnize their horrible or indecent spectacles ; thine eyes look not on resorts of open debauchery. If thy body is shut in, thy spirit is not fettered. Walk in the spirit, and go on the path that leads thee to God. As often as thou walkest in the spirit, thou art not in prison. Thy feet feel not the bonds when thy soul is in heaven. The soul takes the whole man with it, and changes his place at its will. Where thy heart is, there is thy treasure also." Let us also listen to the beautiful exhortation which Bishop Cyprian sent to a North African church during a persecution that threatened them : " We have not," says he, " joined the ranks of the warriors of the Lord, thinking only upon peace ; we shall not be ready to shun conflicts and sufferings, for the Lord has preceded us in the conflict as a teacher of humility and patience, for He has first perfected what he teaches us to perfect ; he has first suffered for us what he commands us to suffer. And let none of you, my dear brethren, disquiet himself when he sees our church scattered and separated through fear of persecution ; let none disquiet himself because he cannot see the brethren assembled together, nor hear the preaching of the gospel. Christians, who are not allowed to slay, but who must allow themselves to be slain, dare not be together. But wherever in these days a brother is separated from the church in time of need, according to the body, and not the soul, wherever he may be forced to fly and to conceal himself,—let him not be afraid of the loneliness and solitude of the place. He cannot be alone who has Christ for the companion of his flight. He is not alone who, wherever he may be, is not without God."

And, let us add, in conclusion, my brethren, that he who has Christ with him, who is not without God, that man is not without comfort and without hope, whatever sorrows befall him ; in no conflict of life is he without assistance and help ; he can be the conqueror

in all his troubles. Therefore, above all things take heed of this, that you always walk in the fellowship of Jesus Christ, and always have your God as your companion ! His love will strengthen and comfort you at all times, and you will be able joyfully to exclaim with the psalmist, " Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil ; for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff comfort me." " My flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever ;" " For thy love is shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost." Amen.

SERMON XI.

THE CEREMONIES WITH WHICH THE EARLY CHRISTIANS
SOLEMNIZED THE MEMORY OF THE DEPARTED.

Whene'er it shall thy pleasure be
That I from earth should part,
Thy grace, I pray thee, grant to me
To go with cheerful heart.
Lord ! heart and soul I give to thee,
A happy end give thou to me,
Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE ecclesiastical year, my brethren, is drawing fast to a close. This is the last Sunday of it which will behold us assembled within these sacred precincts. Does not this earnestly warn us to cast our eyes back upon the course we have run, and thereby to urge on one another as well to praise and glorify the Lord, as to search out and examine ourselves ? Before all things, to the praise and glory of God ; for, has he not during this year, now drawing to its close, again cared for our eternal weal with infinite mercy and truth ; has he not preserved to our use his word and sacraments ; has he not allowed us to preach without interruption his sanctifying gospel, invited us thereby, without intermission, to his kingdom, given us abundantly all those means of grace which serve for the advancement of our soul's welfare, by the conscientious employment of which we may be enlightened, comforted, sanctified, strengthened, and confirmed, in the right faith, in order to eternal life, through Christ Jesus, our Saviour ? Let this form the subject of our consideration this day, and let us thank him with our whole heart for his inexpressible mercy ; and glorifying his name, let us confess " that His mercies fail not, that they are new every morning, and great

is his faithfulness." Let us also not forget to close the ecclesiastical year with earnest self-examination ; and let each of us ask himself, in silent meditation, whether he has used and applied the means of grace that have been offered him according to the will of God, in order to advance daily in knowledge, in faith, and holiness ; whether he has paid due honour to God's word and sacraments ; whether he has never shewn any indifference to, or even despised the preaching of the gospel, and thus obstinately resisted the influence of the Holy Spirit ; and whether it can be truly said of him, that " he has increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man !" Thus, my brethren, shall we rightly conclude the church's year, as is fitting and proper to Christians, who in this way prepare themselves most rightly for their end.

For, does it not appear to you natural that we should this day remember our end ; that, with the close of the year, we should conjoin reflections on the close of our earthly pilgrimage, and meditate calmly upon death ? This is, indeed, most justly the peculiar purpose of the last Sunday in the church's year. Very fittingly is this Sunday devoted to the solemnization of the memory of our departed friends. How many of those who are dear to us have passed away during the course of this bygone year ! They commenced it with us, but they have not, like us, lived to witness its end. Our eye seeks them in vain. The day of grace is past for them, and they have sunk into the night of the grave. We stand at their tombs, weeping and lamenting, one for a dear wife the companion of his life, another for kind parents, a third for a beloved child ; and there probably is not one of us at whom death has not struck a heavy blow during the past year, or at some previous time. To-day we renew the remembrance of our lost friends, partly to satisfy a necessity of the heart that longs for them, and cannot forget the blessings of their society, partly to comfort ourselves with the consolations which our faith gives us, even at the graves of the departed. And as we solemnize this recollection of

them, let us also call to mind our own end. Who knows how near our end is, who can tell how soon our last hour will strike, how soon we shall be called away from our daily tasks, and from the circle of our friends, to a higher completion? "Thou must die," is the lesson which day after day preaches to each one of us; and to this sermon must be added the grave and earnest warning, "Set thy house in order!" Hear it, O mortals, and take it to your hearts! Set your house in order to-day,—now, at this moment, that you may be ready when the Lord calls you, that you may be able to say with truth, "whether my end come to-day or to-morrow, I know that with Jesus I am safe."

Let us, then, at the close of the ecclesiastical year, look to the close of our earthly pilgrimage. And let us at the same time conclude the first part of our considerations relative to the lives of Christians during the earliest ages of our church. Our past researches have sufficiently shewn us, how the spirit that was in them was manifested in their thoughts and lives, how their whole walk was a witness of their faith, and their fellowship with their Redeemer, and had no other end in view than the glory of His name! We intend now, my brethren, to consider them in another point of view, to direct our attention to the form of the church life of those first Christians. And this conclusion of our considerations up to this time, will fit this day most appropriately. We celebrate to-day the feast of the departed. The early Christians also solemnized the memory of their dead, especially of those whom the Lord had perfected by martyrdom. We will now present to you the particulars of this solemnity; and thus shall we best learn how to celebrate, as Christians, the memory of our departed friends. And may the Lord bless our endeavours.

TEXT. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.—1st Cor. xiii. 13.

In faith, hope, and charity, my brethren, are expressed the peculiar characteristics of a Christian. Faith, hope, and charity, comprise his whole nature, and accompany him through his whole life. Faith, hope, and charity, are the angels who support and console him in the most bitter sorrows and heaviest trials, which leave him not when pain and grief come upon him, when he weeps and laments at the bier, or the grave, of those who were dear above all else to his heart. If we look at the Christians of the earliest ages, we shall be convinced of this. If we look to their mode of solemnizing the memory of the departed, we shall find it to have been,

1st, A solemnization of faith,

2d, A solemnization of hope,

3d, A solemnization of love.

May we similarly celebrate the memory of our dead, that our recollection of them may be a truly Christian one !

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth ; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. Christians, enlightened by the gospel, believe in one God, who is love, and who, with infinite wisdom, guides and governs everything, without any exception, little things as well as great, particular and individual, as well as things entire and general. Every man's destiny rests in His hand ; he sends joy and pain ; life and death are in his power, all that he does is done aright, and all things are directed by his holy love to our happiness ; wherefore the apostle says, that " all things work together for good to them that love God." Christians, enlightened by the gospel, believe in an eternal life, a blessed immortality, a resurrection of the body. Death, therefore, to them is no king of terrors, for they know that it is not an annihilation of their being, but a passage to a glorified and higher life, a call of a kind and heavenly Father, to that immortality in which they shall ever partake with their Redeemer. In this

faith the first Christians commemorated the memory of their dead. They knew that they had not fallen sacrifices to a blind chance, or an inexorable fate, but that they had gone home at the call, and according to the will of eternal love, and were, by their departure from earth, so far from having vanished from the ranks of the living, that they had rather now first attained to true life in heavenly fellowship with their Redeemer and their God. Their day of death appeared to them their day of birth into a higher life of imperishable joy and glory, and however deeply they might have felt the separation from those whom they held dear, they yet suffered their faith to lessen and purify their sorrow, to hinder all wild outbreaks of grief, and change their mourning into calm sorrow, and gentle, childlike resignation to the guidance of God's paternal love, so that they could pray with comfort and firmness at the graves of the dead, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." In fearful contrast to this calm, resigned mourning of Christians, stood the wild and often hypocritical expressions of sorrow among the heathens and Jews, and that rude custom by which mourners were hired to accompany the corpse with loud wailing. Christianity put an end to this custom; and, far as it was from its purpose to suppress all natural feelings, and to remove, as weak and sinful and contemptible, grief and mourning for departed friends, yet was its influence great in moderating and calming this sorrow by the power of faith. Of this the teachers of the church especially warned their flocks, as, among many others, Bishop Cyprian thus addressed his people, when a grievous pestilence at Carthage had snatched away many from among them: "We may not bewail those who have been delivered from the world by the call of the Lord, as we know that they are not lost, but sent before hand to take leave of us, in order to precede us. We may long for those who are dead, as for those who have travelled away from us, but we dare not bewail them. We dare not here below put on for them the dark robes

of mourning, for they have there already put on the white robes of glory. We must not give the heathen occasion to accuse us (and justly) of bewailing as lost those of whom we say that they live with God, and thus of not maintaining in our conduct and daily life the faith which we profess with our lips. We who believe and know that Christ has suffered and risen again for us, who remain in Christ, and shall rise again in and through him, should not fear even death, and be unwilling to depart out of this life, should not bewail as lost those of our friends who have parted from us, considering the comfort which our Saviour Christ hath given us: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die!"

Let us, then, my brethren, learn from those first Christians to celebrate the remembrance of the departed in the same spirit of faith, with childlike resignation to the unsearchable ways of our heavenly Father, who guides all things for the good of his saints, and with gratitude to his love, which hath prepared for our dear ones who sleep in Jesus an everlasting glory in heaven. We may, indeed, sorrow and weep, and by our tears honour the recollection of our friends, and testify how dear they were to our hearts, but we may not lament them as did the heathen, and give way without restraint to violent outbreaks of grief, as though there remained no more comfort for us, or as though we knew nothing of heavenly glory, and a blessed eternity. Doubt, and a refusal to be comforted, are no better than indifference and insensibility. Neither of them are becoming to Christians, who believe in the crucified one, who is dead and has risen again, and entered into his glory, with the comforting promise to his followers, that "where he is there shall his servant be also." If, then, O sorrowing Christian, thou art this day renewing the remembrance of pious departed friends, and dost painfully feel that they no longer walk with thee in thy pilgrimage; if thou weepest for dear ones now asleep,

whom thou lovedst, and with whom thy happiness was bound up, forget not that thy Father hath called them home, and humbly reverence his good will and pleasure ; forget not that they are gone to the Father, and are with the Lord, with Jesus Christ their Redeemer, on whom they believed, and whom they loved ; forget not that there they live in glory, and rejoice at their purification in heaven, to which, by God's grace, they have attained, and for which we all, as far as we are really Christians, must, in this state of pilgrimage, heartily long ! Thus will thy memory of them be a worthy and truly Christian one, and be blessed indeed to thee, because it is solemnized in faith.

II. And with the comfort of faith there remains to us also that of hope at the grave of our friends. Or must we, perhaps, fear that we have forever lost those departed from us ? May we expect never to see them again, never to be reunited with them ? Were they, are we ourselves, only passing shadows, which flow back again into the great, wide universe, and leave not a trace of individual, personal, known existence ; and may the spirits which here meet each other in a veil of flesh, and are united in friendship and love, not hope, that, when they have stripped off this mortal covering, they shall find themselves in a glorified and higher life, again known to each other, again united ? These are questions which the pedantic wisdom of the world in vain strives to answer, but which the gospel most satisfactorily answers to every childlike mind. No ! we may not mourn, " as those that have no hope." We walk in the light of the gospel, and the gospel directs us to the most glorious hopes, and opens to us the loveliest prospects beyond the grave. The gospel knows nothing of a loss of personal identity, nothing of an extinction of our being, nothing of an unconscious state to last for ever after death. It preaches to us a Redeemer, who has overcome death, and gives us a firm hope that we shall arise out of death in our own glorified persons to a new and glorious life. It gives us full assurance that

our fellowship with friends, broken off by death, shall be renewed again in a higher life, that we shall find them again in a glorified state in the invisible kingdom of God; that we shall there know them again, and love them more deeply, that God will there "wipe away all tears from our eyes," and that we shall there have to fear no more separation by death, for "death shall be no more." "Now we see through a glass darkly," says the apostle immediately before our text, "but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known."

Behold, my brethren, this is the glorious hope with which the first Christians solemnized the remembrance of the departed. We shall see each other again, was their parting exclamation, and shall then be ever with the Lord, and nothing shall separate the bond of our love. Tertullian expresses himself beautifully on this subject, "We shall," he says, "be so much the more really bound one to the other, as we are destined to a better state, to arise again to a spiritual communion. We shall know ourselves and our friends again. How could we otherwise stand and magnify God throughout eternity, if the feeling and remembrance of all that we owe him did not remain to us? If the consciousness of what we were did not remain even in our glorified nature? We shall be indeed with God, but we shall also be with each other, and shall be all one with God."

Cyprian of Carthage also expresses this confident hope of beholding one another once more in the fellowship of just men made perfect, when he says: "Why do we not hasten to see our own country, to hail our parents? There the great multitude of our friends, parents, brothers, children, await us, certified already of their own salvation, but still troubled about ours. What mutual joy will it be for them and us, to see and embrace each other once more?"

In this hope, then, my Christian friends, will we, as beseems us, celebrate the memory of our dead. The dearer they were to our hearts, the more lively naturally must be our longing after them, and our wish to

see and possess them again, and this desire, which the God of love has himself implanted in us, he will not fail to gratify. There, in the house of their Father, are those pious ones whose loss we lament. There Christ hath "prepared a place for them." There you will find them again, those dear parents whose names you mention with awe, and gratitude, and love. There wilt thou see him again, the faithful husband, with whom thou wert united here below in pious love. There they will one day meet thee in their glorified state, when thy course is ended, those beloved children whom death hath snatched from thee. "And your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." But, doubtless, if we do not wish our hope to fail us, we must before all things have experience of an inward and true communion with the Lord, for we speak only of those who belong to Christ. These are united to him unalterably for all eternity. But for such as lived without Christ, in the lusts of the world, of the flesh, and of sin; for such as die without faith and without repentance, we have no consolation, because the gospel offers no consolation for them. Although believers and unbelievers, holy and unholy, live here on the earth together, yet there subsists between them no true communion, they are rather separated in all those things which most really constitute their being,—and where such a separation is the case here, there will be no communion there, in that life, for the Lord only gathers his *saints* to him to his heavenly glory, and into the kingdom of his righteousness entereth nothing that is common or unclean. Let us, then, all seek after holiness in faith on the Lord, so that when death sooner or later separates us, we may, at the sad hour of parting, be able mutually to comfort one another with the hope of meeting again in the kingdom of eternal love.

III. But are we, my brethren, then actually separated from our pious friends who are asleep in the Lord, so that our only comfort in their departure is in the hope of a distant and future reunion? Is there no com-

munion remaining between us and them? Can a communion of love, which has its foundation in the Lord, and therefore rests on that which is eternal and imperishable, ever be broken up? No, my brethren, death and hell have no power to tear asunder such a bond. This the first Christians felt and knew, and they were therefore conscious of an uninterrupted, invisible spiritual communion with those from whom death had outwardly parted them. They continued united to them in the spirit of love. From this consciousness arose the custom of celebrating the memory of the dead on the anniversary of their death, by their relations, in a manner conformable to the nature of Christian faith and Christian hope, namely, in Christian love. On that day they partook of the Lord's Supper, with the feeling of their inseparable union with them who were dead in Christ. In their name, as though they were still living members of the church, a gift was offered at the altar; they were especially named in prayer, in which Christians then became more than ever conscious of their connection with that general and holy communion of blessed saints to which they belonged. In short, their solemnization of the memory of the dead was a solemnization in love, that love which admits of no separation, which is conscious of an ever-during, spiritual, union with those already made perfect.

In this manner not only individual Christians and Christian families celebrated the memory of the dead, who were peculiarly connected with them in life by the bonds of blood and of relationship, but also whole communities celebrated the memory of those from among them who had died as witnesses of the Lord. The days of their death were solemnized as their birth into a glorified being. They were wont also to manifest a tender regard towards the bodily remains of the dead. These did not appear to them unclean, as did dead bodies to the Jews and heathens. The Christians knew of but one thing dead and unclean, even sin, by which man is separated from the original fountain of all true life. From this uncleanness they deemed that their

hearts must be cleansed by faith in the Redeemer, who suffered and died for us, and who has sprinkled us with his blood, and that they ought always to resign themselves to the new life in Christ, and then all things would become living, pure, and holy. The Christians, therefore, tended the mortal bodies of their deceased friends with especial love and carefulness, as vessels once inspired by a sanctified spirit, as temples of the Holy Ghost, which the Lord would glorify and fashion "like his glorious body." They consequently assembled on the anniversaries of their death at their graves; there they read narrations of their professions and sufferings, and there they celebrated the communion, in the consciousness of their everlasting fellowship with them, in union with him to whom by their martyrdom they had borne testimony. Here, indeed, we see the origin of many errors which were afterwards developed, when men showed the martyrs an over great honour, and made them into idols; and when, in their worship of saints, they forgot the true worship of Him in whose sight the holiest of men are sinners in need of mercy, nothing but weak vessels, in which His spirit dwells and works, so that to Him alone is due all glory and honour for all that men have done great, noble, and glorious in the strength of faith and love. What abuse, too, was there in later times with the so-called relics which men offered to the reverence of believers? But such errors were undoubtedly far removed from the first ages of the church. How purely Christian in their origin the solemn memorial festivals of the dead were, is shewn in the manner in which the church of Smyrna, in their chronicle of the martyrdom of Bishop Polycarp, replied to the reproach of the heathen, who threatened to remove from them the corpse of the martyr, that they might not forsake the Crucified, and begin to worship their bishop. "They knew not," writes the church, "that we can neither forsake Christ, who suffered for the salvation of the whole world, nor worship another. We adore Him as the Son of God, but we love the martyrs as they deserve, for their inexpress-

sible love to their king and master, as we also wish to be their companions and fellow disciples." They then continue: "We took up his bones, more precious to us than gold and silver, and laid them down in the place appropriated for them, and God will grant us to assemble there with joy and jubilee, and celebrate the birth-day feast of his martyrdom, for a remembrance of the departed champion, and encouragement and exercise for those who have still to bear the brunt of the battle."

Let us, my brethren, celebrate the memory of our friends that are asleep after the example of these Christians, in love unfeigned, and forget not what they were to us, and how faithfully they followed their Redeemer in fighting the good fight of faith. And thus shall we be always united to them in love. Removed they are from our bodily eyes, but they are always present to our love. They are invisibly near to us, as often as we renew their remembrance in love, and call to mind their venerable friendly forms. And above all things, their example should induce us to follow in their footsteps. Their spirit, which is the spirit of the Lord, should rest upon us. In this spirit we have uninterrupted communion with them; in this spirit we are entirely one with them. Thus shall we worthily celebrate their memory, our celebration will be a celebration of faith, and hope, and love, and when at last, by God's good pleasure, our last hour shall arrive, we shall leave this world with joy, for we shall there receive again from the Lord in a higher, a glorified and blessed life, those whom we have mourned for here below. Amen,

SERMON XII.

THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

MAY the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, bless us ! May He bless us, and may all the earth fear Him. Amen.

We have once more by God's grace celebrated Whitsuntide, the feast of the foundation of the Christian church, and have thereby been made again conscious of the high dignity, and eternal blessings, which we enjoy as members of this church, and we have also been again reminded of the holy duties, the fulfilment of which is demanded of us as Christians. " Now, therefore," St Paul exclaims to us, " ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God ; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone ; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord : in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Can our dignity, and our duties be more impressively laid before us, my brethren, than in these words of the apostle ? But when we talk of the Christian church, we are accustomed to mean thereby an assembly as well visible as invisible. That is, the society of all true Christians, of all believers, whose souls, sanctified by the Spirit of the Lord, is manifested in a divine walk, and faithful, unswerving following of Jesus Christ. The Lord himself calls them his own, or his sheep, as when he says : " My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me : and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish,

neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Not all, however, who are called Christians belong to this invisible church, for among these unhappily there are but too many in whose minds and lives, not the least trace of the Spirit of Christ is to be perceived; and that saying remains eternally true, "He who hath not the Spirit of Christ is none of His." That man belongs not to him, although he have been baptized in his name, and have called on him "Lord, Lord," a hundred times in the day. Nothing can decide whether thou art really a member of the invisible church, but thy faith, thy love, thy mind, hallowed by God, thy walk in the footsteps of the Lord, thy soul pierced and penetrated by the Holy Spirit. The invisible church, therefore, is but one; she is essentially and necessarily united. In this church we cannot speak of parting and separation. In this church there can be no external differences, but the watchword of all members of this church is and remains this, "One body, one spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all."

But we are accustomed to separate the visible church from this invisible one, my brethren. The visible church is the assemblage of all those who are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, without reference to their thoughts and lives. In this, therefore, we *may* meet with a mixture of believers and unbelievers, of good and bad, of wheat and chaff; and we *do* really meet with them. In this *may* arise separations, schisms, and splitting into different sects, and experience teaches us that they *do* arise. In this there is a Romish, a Greek, a Lutheran, a reformed church, and sects of every denomination, which are not to be found in the invisible church. In this every individual church has its peculiar government, its peculiar arrangements, its peculiar manner of divine service, its peculiar customs. None of them, indeed, dare boast of itself, as the Romish church does, that within its pale alone salvation is to be found; for salvation we obtain only by God's grace through the

redemption that has been effected by Jesus Christ, by means of faith in Him ; but in every one of them we may be led, through the word of God, to faith, and, consequently, to salvation in Christ, and thereby trained and formed for the invisible church ; and any one can only have *this* advantage over the others, that in it this end is attained more easily, surely, and perfectly, than in the others ; and in this view we ought to rejoice thankfully before God, that we are members of the evangelical church, for in this the word of God is preached clear, pure, and uncorrupted ; the holy Scriptures are given into the hands of all ; the holy Sacraments are administered undivided according to the institution of the Lord ; and, lastly, more stress is laid and more attention given to true and spiritual worship of God.

In this light it is that the evangelical church most nearly approaches the primitive Christian church, my brethren, and this consideration will pave the way to the meditations which I shall offer to you, if God will, during the coming Trinitytide. They will form the continuation of the comments which we, during the past year, made together on the life of Christians during the first centuries of the church. Our attention was then especially directed to the religious life of the early Christians, as it manifested itself as the fruit of faith in the Lord. But we must also look at the manner and fashion of this religious life as it developed itself in public worship, or in other words, it is Christian training, the churchman's life, which we have yet to consider, after which we may proceed to depict the lives of Christians as members of a state and family. Consequently, if we then contemplated the Christians, in as far as they were purified by the Spirit of the Lord dwelling within them, as an assemblage of saints, as members of the invisible church, we shall now view them more in the light of members of a visible church, as an external community, visible to the eye, in which we do not regard so much their walk and thoughts in the Spirit of the Lord, as the confession of their faith, as it was made in the public ordinances of divine service. Give, then,

my brethren, to this proposed consideration of the life of Christians during the earliest ages of the church the same attention and interest as during the last year, and join with me in beseeching God's help and assistance in our endeavour.

TEXT. God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things ; and hath made of one blood, all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation : that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us : for in him we live, and move, and have our being ; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.—Acts, xvii. 24–29.

The spirit of Jesus Christ is essentially a framer of communities, my brethren. He urges on irresistibly those who hold the same precious faith, to unite together in public confessions of this faith, and therefore we read of the first Christian church in Jerusalem : “ And all that believed were together, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God.” And thus an ecclesiastical life necessarily arises of itself, an united life to the honour of God, a public, common, divine service, which we call Christian culture. But this divine service makes all kind of regulations necessary ; there must be places prepared, where believers may daily assemble ; there must be days and hours settled for these assemblies ; there must be peculiar ordinances of

divine service. If, then, we wish to contemplate the ecclesiastical life of Christians in the first three hundred years, we must also pay attention by turns to the arrangement of their common divine service, to the holy places where they assembled themselves for divine service, to the holy seasons which were devoted to public assemblies, and to the sacred ceremonies which constituted their divine service. Let us then, to-day, my brethren, consider the two first points, namely,

1. The nature of the common divine service of the first Christians; and,

2. The places, where they used to assemble to divine service.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. The gospel every where impresses on its professors an inward spiritual worship, which is bound up neither to fixed places, nor appointed seasons and uses, and by this it is essentially distinguished from the old testament ordinances, as well as the prevailing sensuous and gorgeous modes of worship of the heathen. For, whilst the heathen in their idolatry and their apotheosis of nature, laid stress only on what was external, and took particular care of vain and empty spectacle, and multiplied means of meditation, addressed solely to the senses, and whilst among the Jews all divine service was connected with an external priesthood, and particular external customs and uses, which it was necessary to perform at fixed seasons, and in an appointed place, we hear the divine founder of the Christian religion, in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, proclaiming, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." In the same way his holy apostles expressed themselves, as St Paul in our text bears witness of the truth against the distorted

and false impressions of the heathen : “ God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things ;” and while he calls their attention to the fact that God, as the eternal spirit, filling all things with his almighty power, and working every where, is confined to no space, he proclaims to them, “ that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us : for in him we live and move, and have our being ;” as certain also of your own poets have said, “ for we also are his offspring ;” on which last point he founds his conclusion, “ forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the godhead is like unto silver, or gold, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.” Thus does Christianity, as the religion of the spirit, purify all things from that which is of the senses, and carnal, to that which is above the senses and spiritual. According to its doctrine, the temple of the Lord is everywhere, where the spirit of Jesus Christ dwells and works in human minds. Thus is every Christian, who is enlightened and sanctified by this spirit, himself a temple, “ an habitation of God through the spirit,” as the apostle says, and his whole life is an unbroken worship of God. God dwells in his heart ; his heart is at the same time temple, altar, and offering, and the true veneration of God dwells in the inmost recesses thereof. “ Know ye not,” writes St Paul, “ that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you. If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple are ye.” “ Ye also,” says St Peter, “ as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” It is, indeed, a noble thought, my brethren ! Every Christian and every Christian community is to be a

temple of the living God, and a dwelling of his holy spirit! Oh! If we were all but duly impressed and penetrated with this consideration, and the feeling of our dignity, how would all things common and unclean, all worldly pleasure and sin, vanish from our hearts, and from amongst us, and make room for the holy spirit, which should alone govern us, should fix Christ's pure image in us, and consecrate us thus as true and worthy worshippers of God! But how many Christians are there, who think nothing of their high destination and glorious dignity, and are to be compared to the heathen, who have no conception of a spiritual worship of God, and who were struck by nothing in the first Christians so much as the total absence of all the pomps and ceremonies of other religions. "No temple, no altars, no images." This, Celsus, one of the most violent opponents of Christianity, objected especially to their faith, to whom Origen thus replies, "The temple and image of God are in the highest senses in the manhood of Jesus Christ, and after him in all believers inspired by his spirit; these are living images, with which no images, no, not the master-pieces of human artists, are to be compared."

It certainly became soon needful to choose fixed places for divine service; for the spirit of the Lord, which dwelt in the hearts of believers, and filled them with holy love, one toward another, aroused in them also as well the need as the impulse and desire to unite together for prayer. They wished "to build one another up in their most holy faith," with one mind to lift up their hearts to God in pious meditation and thought, in order thus mutually to confirm and strengthen each other in faith and love, and holiness. But, though they did this, they held fast the true evangelical view of the inward and spiritual worship; they never thought of attributing a peculiar holiness to these places of prayer. They were far from supposing that God was present in these places only, and could here alone be honoured. Men knew themselves to be always near

Him, and forgot not the apostle's declaration, "He is not far from every one of us; for in Him we live and move, and have our being." Therefore men did not consider that it was the place that sanctified, but much rather that it was itself sanctified by their united prayer, as indeed every place is consecrated as holy, wherein the spirit is raised up to God. "The place," says Origen, "where believers meet for prayer, is indeed salutary and profitable, for Christ, with the whole host of heaven is present with these congregations of the faithful, and men must not despise prayer in such assemblies, for they impart a peculiar strength to him who takes part in them with an upright heart." "It is not the place, but the assembly of the elect, which I call the church," says Clement of Alexandria; and Tertullian writes, "We can pray in every place where opportunity or necessity require, like the apostles, who prayed to God and sung to His praise in prison."

There is certainly always a great danger for sensual men to turn the external into the essential, and thereby to leave out of their consideration the true, and real, and spiritual worship of God. He often "begins in the Spirit," as the Galatians did, and, like them, "is made perfect in the flesh;" and therefore he has urgent cause in all things earnestly to watch over himself. Thus, too, among the first Christians, there were not wanting some, who did not maintain in all its height and depth that spiritual position, but began to attribute an especial worth to external forms, and were inclined to make a difference between the Christian life and demeanour inside and outside of the church. Clement of Alexandria writes even then zealously against this false impression, and says, "The disciples of Christ should appear the same throughout their whole life, and shew themselves as gentle, as pious, as honourable, as full of love, as they are in the church. I do not know how it is that they alter so much with the place they are in in their conduct and demeanour. They lay aside the spiritual aspect which they have assumed in the church,

as soon as they leave it, and make themselves like the world in which they are. They prove themselves liars, and shew how their inmost thoughts were busied, by their laying aside the mask of religion which they had assumed. How should they, who wish to honour God's word, leave it behind them in the place where they heard it."

Alas, my brethren, how many Christians of our times must feel convicted by this reproof, who think that they serve God worthily, when they, from time to time, visit the church, attend the holy sacrament, and are present at our usual united religious exercises, and appear not to know that we should "worship God in spirit and in truth," and that our whole life ought to be one continuous act of worship! O, take it this day to your hearts! Consecrate yourselves, all of you, as a dwelling and a temple of the Lord, and "present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God!" Think not that it is enough, when in the church, to avoid the world, and to be pious, no, in the world we must fly the world, and strive after holiness! Think not that it is enough in the church to serve God, to think on Him, to pray to Him, to sing to His praise! No, He is every where, and at all times, near to us; "in Him we live and move and have our being;" He dwells not in our temples alone, He dwells in every place. Let Him dwell, then, in your hearts also, and wherever you go raise your thoughts up to him. Direct your thoughts to Him in the church and in the house, in solitude, and in society with other men, in your occupations, and in your refreshments, and pleasures; whether you rejoice, or whether you sorrow, in every place say, "Surely the Lord is in this place," and therefore never allow yourselves in any place any thing sinful, but allow the spirit of Jesus Christ every where to direct and guide you. Thus, will you be true Christians, thus will you rightly honour God, thus will your whole life be devoted to His service, as the gospel requires of you, and as we have this day sung together:

"Thou immortal Being!
 May we praise thee ever,
 And to serve thee aye endeavour!
 May we soon, as angels,
 Stand before thy throne,
 And be with thee as thine own!
 May we strive
 In thee to live,
 And our dearest duty be
 Ever, Lord, to worship thee."

II. Let us consider, secondly, my brethren, the places in which the first Christians assembled for social worship. We shall find, from the Acts of the Apostles, that the believers first assembled in the temple at Jerusalem. There the apostles taught, there the multitudes came together. But, besides this, they had already begun to make use of private dwelling-houses for their meetings. "They broke bread from house to house," says the sacred history; and the stronger the contrast became in which Christianity stood to Judaism, the more natural was it that the believers in the gospel should retire into their houses, in order that they might there, without interruption, give themselves up to exercises of piety. Thus did Mary, the mother of Mark, willingly devote her house in Jerusalem to such meetings for prayer; thus Gaius at Corinth is entitled the host of the whole church, because the church used to assemble in a room of his house; thus there is mention twice made of a church within the house of Aquila and Priscilla, because they had probably given up their dwellings for the general edification of the faithful. They had no churches, and therefore private dwellings had to supply their place; and wherever in more important towns the number of the Christians was too large, they divided themselves, and assembled in different places. When Justin Martyr was asked, "where do you assemble?" he answered, "where each man will and can; we do not all assemble in one place, for the God of the Christians is not enclosed in space, but, though invisible, He fills heaven and earth with his presence, and is worshipped by believers everywhere." In times of persecu-

tion the Christians frequently withdrew into solitary and desert places, among rocks and subterranean caverns, in order to edify each other by united prayer. But, in time, especially as the welfare of the communities increased, and they themselves became daily more extended, buildings were erected for the especial purpose of worship ; and, in the third century, splendid churches were already scattered here and there in large towns.

We are not in want of churches, my brethren. We certainly might and should possess a greater number of them, if we take into consideration the extension of our town and community. But of those which we have, we may always say, that there is room enough in them, and if any one remains away from our assemblies for divine service, it cannot be really because there is no room to be found for them. They do not come, because they have no wish to come, because they are quite indifferent as regards church and the preaching of the gospel. Neither is long distance from the church a reason for remaining absent, for those who live farthest off are often the most regular, and those who live nearest most irregular in their attendance. And, lastly, it is not always the unfavourable weather which keeps many away, who might easily come, for the weather does not generally withhold them from pursuing this or that pleasure. The reason lies, in most cases, in the total want of a church-loving mind, and this it is which prevents thousands of our Christians from visiting God's house. If the word of God were hard to be obtained among us, men would perhaps revere it more ; but they can obtain it easily, and men are often most indifferent to that which they can obtain with the least trouble ! And yet there are Christians enough who manifest a praiseworthy zeal in visiting the church ; and they are not content with this only, they go also backwards and forwards to each other's houses, like the early Christians, in order to edify themselves with songs and prayers, and pious meditations. We are far from blaming this, my brethren, we rather praise it, if it only be not a thing purely external ; but if, before all things, this

be considered that our divine worship be inward and spiritual, our adoration,—an adoration in spirit and in truth. Look to this especially, my brethren, and it will doubtless bring you great blessings, if you “suffer the word of God to dwell abundantly among you, and build yourselves up in your own most holy faith.”

For the rest, the places of assembly of the first Christians were perfectly simple, and no ornaments were to be seen in them. By this the believers in the gospel came into the most decided contrast to the heathen, whose temples were filled with pictures and statues of gods, and who layed great stress on external appearance, on pomp and beauty. The Christians rejected all such works of art, and especially shunned idols, for what the apostle says in the text was stamped upon their minds, “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.” “We must not cleave to that which belongs to the senses,” says Clement of Alexandria, against the use of images among the heathen, “but raise ourselves to the spiritual; the habitual viewing of it desecrates the dignity of the heavenly, and he who wishes to honour the spiritual nature by means of earthly material, does the same as if he wished to dishonour it by sensuality.” The Christians, therefore, were far from preparing and setting up images of Christ. The image of Christ dwelt in them, and shone forth from them in works of righteousness and love; these with *them* were the chief things, and with us they must be so too. Christ in us is the highest ornament of the soul, and if Christians enter the church thus adorned, they impart to it the most glorious ornament, and it needs no external decoration or magnificence. Meanwhile we wish to take no one-sided view, and thus set aside artistic labour, when this dedicates itself to the service of religion, and worthily imitates holy subjects, in order to decorate the house of God. Works of art are and will be to men under the dominion of sense a means for spiritual elevation, but ought not and must not be more, lest it

should become a snare and temptation unto us. We will not, therefore, my brethren, suffer this means to sever us from heavenly things, in order to lead us to them, and we will guard ourselves from the delusion of thinking that there is something holy and indispensable in our churches, and therefore overburdening them with images, and other decorations.

The use of religious images, also, among the early Christians, by no means proceeded from the church, but from family life. The heathens used to adorn their dwellings with pictures of their gods, and their history. These covered the walls, were embossed on their cups and drinking-vessels, were even found frequently on their signet-rings, and to these pictures of idols the heathens offered their worship. By this conduct, the moral feeling of the Christians was disturbed and vexed, and they therefore sought to repress these heathen images by others, which spoke of their belief, and reminded them of their Christian calling, of their advantages and hopes, as professors of the gospel. They therefore desired to have on their cups the image of a shepherd, with a lamb upon his shoulders, to signify the Redeemer, who seeks and saves lost sinners. On their seal-rings they had either a dove, as the emblem of the Holy Spirit, or a fish, the letters of the name of which, in Greek, formed the initials of the following words: "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour;" or a ship sailing toward heaven, an emblem of the Christian church, or of a faithful soul, which hastens to its haven of rest in heaven, on the billowing waves of this world; or a harp, as emblem of Christian joy; or an anchor, as emblem of Christian hope. But by the end of the third century, these images had come out of household use into the church, so that it was at last found needful to reject this innovation; and a Council at the end of the fourth century especially ordained, "the objects of divine worship shall not be painted upon the walls."

But the sensuous representation of the sign of the cross seems to have crept very early into use among Christians, as members both of the church and of fami-

lies. This sign consecrated them at their rising up and lying down, at their going in and out, in all important dealings and undertakings, and they made it involuntarily, when sudden terror struck them. It was certainly an innocent and beautiful sign, as long as it signified their belief, that all their life must be sanctified by the relation it held to the crucified Redeemer, and that this faith was the most powerful means of conquering all evil. But unhappily men proceeded to reverence the sign more than him to whom it pointed, and even in the third century we find traces of their attributing to it a supernatural, sanctifying, and preserving power, an error which has often been repeated, and even in our days frequently recurs in the Romish church, where men make a sinful misuse of consecrated images, rosaries, and the like. But our evangelical church attributes to such like external things absolutely no value, my brethren. She especially insists on an inward, spiritual worship of God, whereby our faith may be preserved through our whole lives, and holds external things as having no merit whatever of their own. And let us continue, my brethren, to look on them in the same way, and pray the Lord to keep us in his truth, that we may worship him as he wills to be worshipped, and look only to this, how Christ may be glorified and magnified in and through us ; for in his sight, nothing else, except his own image, has any worth. Amen.

SERMON XIII.

THE HOLY SEASONS IN THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN
CHURCH.

O MOST holy God, separate us from the world, and raise us in meditation to thee. May the stillness of thy Sabbath ever rest upon us, that we may have our walk in heaven. Be thou, O Lord Jesus, as thou hast promised, in the midst of us ; for we are assembled together to pray in thy most prevailing name. O do thou bless us with thy blessings. Amen.

There are, I doubt not, in the life of each individual, important, I might almost say, sacred days and seasons, which, although they be to all appearance intrinsically the same as others, yet, in a certain measure, stand out before, and are marked out among them, partly on account of the recollections connected with them, partly on account of the manner in which we celebrate them. There are likewise days and seasons of a higher import, whose influence again extends over the other days and seasons of life, and serves to give a holiness to them also. Thus we are wont to consider our birthdays as especially important, and to mark them particularly, and that certainly not without reason, when we reflect that the time of grace commences with us when we enter into this earthly existence, on the use and application of which depends the decision of our eternal destiny. Thus, also, those days appear to us as peculiarly worthy our remembrance on which something extraordinary has happened to us, or which have had some great and decisive influence on our whole lives ; as, for example, the day of our entering into the marriage state, or the day on which we entered upon any vocation to

which we dedicate all our time and powers, or that on which dear friends were snatched away from our sides by death. Such times are, and continue to be, important to us, particularly if they have exercised any marked influence on our lives, and have perhaps given them a new turn and direction.

But that, my brethren, which, on this head, is the case with individuals, is generally the case also with larger societies. In the existence of nations and of churches, we find such consecrated days, such festive seasons, which are distinguished before all others. The birthday, or the day of the ascension of the throne of a beloved monarch, the anniversaries of important occurrences in the history of a people, the days of remembrance of great and decisive victories, by which our country has preserved its independence, these are feast-days which, although not celebrated every where, through the land, are yet, at least, always kept in many societies of larger or smaller extent. And has not the church her feast-days, her holy seasons, which are dedicated to the memory of remarkable and important events, namely, of the wonderful acts of the life of their divine founder? Do we not celebrate our Sunday every week? Do we not every year celebrate the high feasts of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide? Does not the memory of the reformation of the sixteenth century remain strong and sacred? Do we not close our ecclesiastical year with a celebration to the memory of the departed? Such days and seasons we peculiarly appropriate to pious meditations; they are the days on which we come together in our churches to our public exercises of piety.

How did matters stand in this regard in the Christian church of antiquity, my brethren? Had they, even at that time, their feasts and holy seasons, and what were the days which were particularly distinguished from others? What views prevailed among Christians in general on this subject during the first centuries? We must all of us desire to find out and know, how far our present regulations agree with those of former days, or differ from them. As then, my brethren, we have com-

menced an inquiry into the ecclesiastical life of the early Christians, and spoke on the last occasion of the holy places where the believers in the gospel were wont to assemble for their public services, let us this day follow out our researches farther, and treat of the holy seasons which were then appropriated to united worship. We are now celebrating our Sunday. May our meditations contribute to making it a day of blessing to us, that we may consecrate and dedicate to the Lord not only this day, but every day of our lives. And let us together beg of him, in silent prayer, to grant us his grace in our undertaking.

TEXT. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new-moon, or of the Sabbath-days : which are a shadow of things to come ; but the body is of Christ.—Col. ii. 16, 17.

Thus does the apostle Paul express himself, he who had grasped the spirit of Christianity in all its purity, in opposition to those who had set up the distinction of certain meats, and the celebration of certain feasts, as necessary and inomissible for religion and the salvation of souls, and who were disposed to judge and condemn those who would not be bound by the like observances. And in these words he declares the principle which prevailed in the earliest times of the Christian church in relation to the observance of feast-days, without entirely rejecting the appointment and setting apart of feast-days at set times for public and congregational worship. His principles will appear clear and distinct when we proceed to treat farther of the holy times of the Christians of the first centuries. Let us then consider,

1. How the early Christians in general thought of holy seasons.
2. What feasts were originally celebrated in the church ; and,
3. How we ought to consider our holy seasons and feasts.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth ; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. Before all things, my brethren, we must not forget what I reminded you of in my last discourse, that Christianity is a religion of the spirit, by which the views that prevailed, both among Jews and heathens, of an especial priesthood, and especially holy places and consecrated seasons, have been thoroughly changed, and transferred from the domain of the flesh to that of the spirit. The great principle of Christians, as regards the worship of God, must be this, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." The gospel never places any weight in the form, but in the spirit ; never lays any stress upon the shadow, but upon the reality, upon the body itself, as is said in our text, of the laws concerning meat, and the holy days of the old covenant, "which are a shadow of things to come, but the body (that is, the reality), is Christ," that is, is to be found in Him alone, in Him, and in the kingdom of God, which he has founded. The shadow is indeed a faithful copy of the body, but it cannot exist without : in and for itself it is nothing, and has no being ; it only serves to point to the body, and he who possesses the body, will no more require the shadow. Thus, the Old Testament, with all its holy persons and uses, and all its sacred ordinances, was but a shadow of things to come ; *i. e.* of that new order of things which have begun in and with Christ. In Christ we have the reality, the one thing needful for man's salvation and his everlasting happiness. He, therefore, who still holds to the Old Testament, has grasped the shadow, and lost sight of the reality, the body itself. No one can be saved by the precepts of the Old Testament, but only by Him whom they mark out, as the shadow does the body. In Christ, and in Christ alone, is salvation given unto us. That man who is truly in Christ, is exempted from every law concerning holy seasons which had force under the Jewish dispensation, for he knows that there is no time

in his life which must not be dedicated to God, and thus, that there is no time which should be to him more holy than another. As every place appears to him holy, because God is every where present, so must every moment be dedicated to Him, and the whole life pass with regard to him. In this sense St Paul exhorts, "Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new-moon, or of the Sabbath-days." The Sabbath appears, viewed in the light of the gospel, as a day of rest, not a single day, severed from the rest, but it should be rather every day, the whole life should rather be one unbroken Sabbath, on which we should rest, not outwardly from work and occupation, but inwardly from every evil thought. The Christian must every where, and at every time in the week, as upon the Lord's day, witness, by thought, word, and deed, that he belongs to God, and is his property. He will be always at worship; he will be always planning and thinking how to please God; and his whole life will, in like manner, be consecrated by unremitting dedication of it to him, and will serve to the glory of His name. St Paul combats this keeping holy of set seasons and days, in as far as men wished to consider them as necessary to salvation, as empty ordinances, as something thoroughly unevangelical, as a return "to the bondage of the law," as a lapse into the fleshly principles of Judaism. The gospel gives us no authority to make a difference of days, to sever one time from another, and to say, "This day thou must sanctify to God, and not another; on this day thou *must* serve God, on that it is not necessary; and without observing these, thou canst not be saved." The apostle blames the Galatian Christians impressively, for having suffered themselves to be misled by false teachers, to change the free, evangelical spirit, for the beggarly elements of Judaism, and for considering the Mosaic dispensation in its whole extent as binding and necessary to salvation, and also for observing the Jewish feasts. "But now that ye have known God, or rather are known of God," he exclaims to them (that is, are

led to know him by his pitying love), "how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years, that is, you make your justification, and sanctification, and salvation, depend upon them, whilst, in fact, these things can only be obtained by faith through God's mercy in Christ Jesus." And, in like manner, he writes to the Colossians in our text, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new-moon, or of the Sabbath-days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." This, then, my brethren, was the manner in which the early Christians thought on and viewed this subject. They thought all days ought alike to be holy to the Lord. The first church at Jerusalem therefore assembled daily for united prayer, for united reading of God's holy word, for united celebration of the holy supper of the Lord, and the so-called *Agapæ*, or love-feasts.

The believers in the gospel felt a deep and inalienable conviction of the necessity of maintaining unbroken and confirming their union with their invisible head, and their brotherly community. We find even later traces of such daily assemblies of churches for the purpose of united worship. But though, by degrees, in order to satisfy the needs of men yet under the partial dominion of sense, namely, those weak brethren who had not yet arrived "at the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ," particular seasons were chosen out, in order to connect religious recollections with them, to dedicate them especially to congregational worship, and thereby to exercise a sanctifying and hallowing influence over their whole lives; yet this was not in itself any thing to be rejected, or irreconcilable with the principles of the gospel. It was rather a whole-some condescension to those weaker brethren, who could only by degrees be elevated to a higher and more spiritual position, and towards whom the gospel itself urgently recommends regard and consideration. This separation of particular seasons of feasting and solemnity

then only became unevangelical, when men pretended to deduce them from divine command, when they gave them an essential sacredness and holiness beyond all other times, and wished to make their observance necessary to justification and salvation, and thus introduced into the life of Christians a contrast of common and uncommon days, without any foundation, and thereby hid from their eyes the duty of consecrating all days alike to the Lord, by carefully keeping the heart and life from all contact with things unclean, sinful, and ungodly, and from all defilement of the world. With the progress of time this primitive view was indeed lost, but in the first ages of the church it certainly prevailed everywhere.

II. In considering the holy seasons, and feast-days, my brethren, we have to distinguish between those which recurred weekly, and those whose celebration was annual. Originally weekly festivals alone were celebrated; yearly ones were of later introduction. One day in the week had been from the beginning of the world hallowed by God, and as long as Christians did not claim any merit in the observance of it, they were at liberty, without hesitation, to distinguish it from other days by especial devotional exercises. But there was another day whose celebration was incumbent upon them, and they preferred choosing the day of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as being the beginning of a new spiritual creation, for their weekly feast-day. They thus declared the ground on which they built all their hope, and they thus made use of the "liberty wherewith they had been made free" by Christ. There is more than one mention of the celebration of the Sunday in the gospels, and in the book of Revelation, we find it already called the Lord's day. In the second century, the celebration of the Sunday had already become general. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, alludes to it in an epistle, saying, "If those who have been bred under the old covenant have attained a new hope, and no more celebrate their Sabbaths, but dedicate their

lives to the Lord's day, on which their lives arose with Christ, how shall we be able to live without him?" For the rest, they celebrated the Sunday as a day of joy, on which they did not fast, and prayed, not kneeling, but standing, as their Lord, by his resurrection had raised up fallen man from the earth to which he had sunk.

As Sunday was especially holy to Christians as being the day of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, so also did they feel the need of marking the sufferings and death of the Lord, by days devoted to their memory, being conscious that their whole hope of happiness rested on his death, and his subsequent resurrection. To this end they celebrated the Wednesday, as the day of his betrayal, and Friday as the actual day of his death. On these days they met for prayer, and fasted till three o'clock in the afternoon, but yet every one was left free to join them or not, according to his inclination, or his particular needs. No sort of law was established respecting them, and compulsion was far from their thoughts. These prayers, conjoined with fasting, were called the "vigils of the soldiers of Jesus Christ," and the days themselves vigil days, because on those days especially, the Christians watched as warriors of the Lord, and were likewise bound to stand at their posts against their spiritual enemies.

As Christ's death and resurrection were the foundation of the weekly feasts, so also were they of the annual. The feast of Easter was celebrated in memory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the season of fasting that preceded it was dedicated to the memory of his sufferings. There were among the Christians many divisions with respect to the celebration of both these seasons. The Jewish converts could not agree on this point with the heathens. The former celebrated their Easter feast at the same time with the Jews, and joined to it the eating of the passover. The others, on the other hand, would have nothing to do with the passover, and maintained that the day of resurrection ought to be commemorated on a Sunday, and the day of the Lord's

death on a Friday. Yet, notwithstanding this difference the Christians lived peaceably and quietly with each other; for they remembered the apostolic precept, that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink," or any such external thing, but "righteousness, peace and joy in the holy Ghost." And thus it remained till the time of the Roman bishop Victor. During his episcopate, however, in the year 190, a violent quarrel broke out, in which he allowed himself to be carried away so far by his blind zeal as to excommunicate the churches of Lower Asia, who would not agree to his views. But this unchristian conduct was received with lively opposition and general disapproval, through the then prevailing influence of the true, free and evangelical spirit; and Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, wrote a strong letter of reproof, in which he says, among other things: "The apostles have ordered us to judge no man respecting meats and drinks, or set feast-days, or new moons, or Sabbaths. Whence these contentions? Whence these divisions? We celebrate feasts, but in the leaven of malice and wickedness, whilst we tear asunder the church of God, and we look to outward things and neglect the higher points, faith and love." Golden words are these, my brethren, which our times need much to take to heart, when so many Christians are causing differences and schisms concerning the keeping of feasts, and forget the warning of the apostle, "Endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

A time of fasting preceded in the early church the celebration of the feast of Easter, the length of which was not then accurately determined. A reference to our Lord's forty days fasting in the wilderness, soon gave occasion to the Christians of some places to make this fast one of forty hours, which was afterwards extended to forty days.

To the feast of the resurrection was added that of Whitsuntide, to commemorate the first revelation of the glorified Redeemer. This was very nearly a transferring of a feast of the Old Testament to one of the New. The Jewish Pentecost was celebrated as a

harvest feast, and as the feast of the giving of the law at Sinai. As, then, in the old covenant, the first fruits of harvest in the kingdom of nature were offered, so did the Christian Whitsuntide call to mind the first fruits of the harvest in the kingdom of grace; and as the Jewish feast was dedicated to the memory of the giving of the law from Mount Sinai on tables of stone, so did Christians wish to preserve the memory of the new law of the spirit given for the heavenly Jerusalem. Originally this embraced all the space of fifty days after Easter, which were celebrated like a Sunday. But afterwards only the feast of the ascension, and the proper day of Pentecost were observed. During this time men neither fasted nor prayed kneeling, but standing, and held, in many places, at least, daily prayer meetings, joined to the celebration of the communion.

And as men in the primitive Christian church considered all things with reference to Christ's sufferings and resurrection, so were these before named feasts the only ones which were generally celebrated during the first centuries. Only doubtful traces of a Christmas festival are found at this time; but the feast of the appearance of Jesus in the office of Messiah, his consecration to that office at the baptism of John, called the feast of the Epiphany, was probably pretty generally celebrated.

Lastly, the feasts in memory of the martyrs belonged to these annual festivals. These days were regarded as their birth-days into a heavenly and imperishable life, a representation as true as it is beautiful, which is a witness of the glorious nature of the Christian faith. On the anniversaries of the deaths of these martyrs they assembled at their graves. There the history of their sufferings was read, they were remembered in the Church's prayers, and the communion was celebrated, to testify that they were conscious of an abiding union and society with them in the Lord.

III. Let me now close my considerations, my brethren, with some remarks on the manner in which we

ought to look on our holy days and seasons. In this I entreat you above all things to hold fast the principal point of view in which the early Christians regarded them. We celebrate Sundays and feast-days. We meet together on these days for God's service, we pray and sing one with another, we occupy ourselves in meditating on God's word. But let no one dream that feast-days alone must be marked by devotional exercises of this nature! Let no one think it is enough to worship God on Sundays and feast-days! No! the whole life must be one divine service, and be consecrated by prayer and pious thoughts, and all days must be made holy to the Lord, by our avoiding sin and wantonness, and giving ourselves up to Him. Every day is a Sunday and a feast-day to the true Christian, for the spirit of the Lord always guides them, and purifies their whole walk, that it should be a walk in heaven. To this we allude in our Sunday prayer at the altar, when we together call on the Lord, "Open our ears and hearts, that we may hear with reverence thy holy word, examine it with industry, and keep it in a pure heart, that we may call upon thee and be comforted, and that we may keep not only this day, but all the days of our brief and toilsome life free from all sin." My first exhortation therefore, to you all is: Sanctify all your life to the Lord, take heed that your whole life may be one unbroken Sabbath, a constant rest from all sinful lusts and acts!

To this I will append another warning, my brethren, namely this, not to think that your salvation depends on the celebration of any single fixed day. Nay, rather, you may celebrate all Sundays and feast-days most punctually and conscientiously, and neglect no opportunity of worship, and yet will never be saved, if you withdraw your hearts from the Lord at all other times, and dedicate them to the service of the world and sin. Your salvation depends on nothing, but your faith on our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He makes you righteous, holy, blessed; and if you are not always in communion with him by faith, the punctual keeping of

Sundays and feast-days has neither merit nor claim to salvation.

Thirdly, I would exhort you to let the word of Christ dwell abundantly among you. As your whole life ought to be one continued solemnity, so ought every day to arouse you to devotional exercises, to prayer, to lifting up of your hearts to the Lord, and contemplation of his word. For this purpose family worship is indispensably necessary, and where it does not exist, must straightway be introduced. Fathers, mothers, children, companions, join together daily in devotional practices! "Teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," and "build yourselves up on your most holy faith," and be earnest in prayer! Alas, there is so much lack of family-worship in these days! But true Christians cannot omit it, for their whole life is passed in connection with the Lord, and every day is to them a Sunday, a feast-day, which they dedicate to Him, and remember Him.

Lastly, I exhort you, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is." The Sundays, the feast-days, and holy seasons of the church, are intended to effect that the community should assemble and strengthen itself by prayer and pious meditation on the word of the Lord, and mutual, brotherly fellowship and love; and such united devotion was intended to have a hallowing influence on all the rest of our lives. But where men are indifferent to this church celebration of days, experience teaches us, that, by degrees, all sense for that which is divine and eternal disappears, and earthly thoughts, the love of the world, the love of sensuality and ungodliness, get the upper-hand, the spiritual life droops, and, at last, sinks into spiritual death. Therefore keep the feast, my brethren, not outwardly, not according to the letter, but in the spirit of the Lord, and the more zealous you shew yourselves in it, the more certainly will you dedicate your whole lives to God as one continuous day. Alas! what is there in our times which we have more to complain of than the violation and desecration of holy days?

How frivolous in that respect is the present generation? How sorely does the ever-increasing search for pleasure and amusement, and the daily extending earthly frame of mind, stand in the way of the calm Christian observance of our holy days? We make now no longer any difference between holidays and other days,—not, indeed, from the feeling that such a difference cannot subsist in the sight of God, and in the life of a true Christian, because every day should be holy unto the Lord, for this were a highly Christian view, and full of joy, but because the service of mammon, the world, and idols, stands in the way of the service of God. Now no day in the week is dedicated to God. Week-days and Sundays, and feast-days, are alike devoted to the service of earthliness. This is indeed sad and melancholy. Alas! how much in this matter must the example of the first Christians shame us, for they made no difference of days, for this reason, that they dedicated every day to the service of their God and Saviour, as we read of the church at Jerusalem, “They continued daily with one accord in the temple, and broke bread from house to house, and eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God.” Behold your pattern, Christians! Follow this example, and determine, not only to hallow the *feast-day*, but also to serve the Lord throughout your whole lives, so that your lives may be one Sabbath, that you may one day celebrate the Sabbath above in the heavenly Jerusalem with all the church of the elect, where, with angel tongues and hearts we shall praise the great acts of the Lord, and glorify him for ever. Amen.

SERMON XIV.

OF THE DIVINE SERVICES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

O LORD, our God, send us thy light and thy truth, that they may guide us, and fill us with the spirit of thy dear Son, that our prayer may be acceptable in thy sight. Bless the preaching of thy holy word, and let it not return to thee void, but give thy grace, that it may, as thou hast promised, accomplish that which thou pleassest, and prosper in the thing whereto thou sendest it. Amen

God's holy day has again assembled us in his sanctuary for public worship. We would "build ourselves up on our most holy faith." We feel the need of united lifting up of spirit and heart unto God. The illumination of the spirit, and the sanctifying of the heart are the goals which the church proposes to her members; it is her wish that they should consecrate their whole lives to a heavenly, and therefore a blessed life. To this end she has instituted congregational exercises of devotion, and he who takes part in them with right feelings, bears witness thereby, that his salvation is not indifferent to him. But what means does our church employ to attain this end? Is it her plan to give nourishment to our senses, and to content an idle love of shew by means of worldly pomp, empty display, and multiplied ceremonies, or does not rather all that we see and hear in her bear the stamp of the most exalted simplicity? You can find nothing in our churches or our divine services which would fetter your curious looks, tickle your ears, disturb your spirits, or delight your senses. Our evangelical church disdains to effect passing im-

pressions on the senses by means of outward splendour, which can neither advance us in knowledge of the truth, or in sanctification of heart and life; she never leaves out of her sight that highest principle of the Christian faith, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." In this respect she differs in the most decided manner from the church of Rome, in which abundant food is offered to the senses, by the pomp and magnificence of their divine services; but, on the other hand, she approaches the primitive Christian church, whose services were particularly remarkable for dignified simplicity, and were especially calculated for the illumination of the spirit, and the sanctification of the thoughts, heart, and life.

We have already called your attention, my brethren, in our previous discourses, to the fact, that nothing so much struck the heathens as the simplicity of Christian worship, and that they often reproached the believers in the gospel, "that they had no temples, no altars, no images." In fact, there was to be found in the Christian worship no trace of the pomp and dead ceremonial worship of the Jews and heathens. The purpose of their sacred assemblies was no other than to arouse the partakers in them to lead a Christian life dedicated to God, and to strengthen them, and they therefore considered instruction and edification as the chief matters. Congregational prayer, therefore, and congregational meditation on God's word formed the chief duties of their ecclesiastical lives. And thus we read in the Acts of the Apostles of the first Christian church in Jerusalem, that "they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers, and continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God." And this is the account which Pliny, a Roman governor, in the year 120, under the emperor Trajan, gives of the Christians who were brought before his judgment-seat in great numbers, when he tells him what he had heard from their own mouths concerning their occupations at

their religious meetings, namely, that they are wont to assemble early on a fixed day, that is the Sunday, that they sang together a hymn to the praise of their God, Christ, and pledged themselves, not as popular reports had it, to acts of horror and crime, but to commit neither theft, nor adultery, to keep sacred their plighted word, never to deny a deposit left with them, but to restore it conscientiously ; and that having then separated they met again in the evening for an united and innocent feast, probably for the celebration of the holy communion, joined with the *Agapæ* or love-feasts.

The divine service of the first Christians had accordingly two chief objects, my brethren, viz. that of occupying themselves with God's word, and celebrating the holy communion, and the purpose of these was chiefly common edification and advancement in holiness and knowledge. And thus it still remains among us. In our public services, the most essential part is the reading and meditation on God's holy word, and the celebration of the communion. Let, us then, investigate what was the plan of these holy ordinances in the primitive Christian church, and how far our mode of public worship agrees with or differs from theirs. But as this would afford too much material for one discourse, we will confine ourselves to day to the consideration of the ecclesiastical life of Christians in the first centuries, as regarded their occupation in the word of God in their public services ; and may the Lord give us his blessing in our task.

TEXT. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.—Jude, 20, 21.

The words which we have just read to you, my brethren, give us clearly and precisely the highest purpose of our public worship. It is no other than the building up of the members of the church on their most holy faith, which the gospel proclaims, and confirmation and

preservation in the love of God, in order to a life of eternal blessedness, to which we are called through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. But the means by which this purpose may be obtained in all, are pious meditation and prayer. The early Christians held firmly and steadily to this point of view in their lives as churchmen, and in their assemblies for public worship. Of this we shall become convinced when we consider the particular sacred ordinances which composed their public worship. These were,

1. Reading of the holy Scriptures.
2. Preaching of God's word.
3. Prayer.
4. Singing.

Let us dwell a few minutes on each head with earnest meditation and attention.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. To grow ever "in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour," ever to advance in holiness of life and heart, to "build themselves up on their most holy faith," and ever to become more deeply grounded and rooted therein,—this was the glorious goal which the first Christians unremittingly hastened to, this was their primary care and anxiety, this they considered as their most holy calling. On this account they came together daily, on this account they, in later times, assembled on stated days of festivity, and this was the end which their separate religious ordinances, which took place at their meetings for divine service, had in view. One of the chief and most important was *the reading of the holy Scriptures*; and in this respect Christians had only to make use of the institution which already existed among the Jews; for it was an old custom in the Jewish synagogues to read publicly sections of the Old Testament. Thus, St James reminds the council at Jerusalem, "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being

read in the synagogues every Sabbath day." This ordinance then came into use in Christian congregations. At first, they used to read a portion of the Old Testament, particularly the prophetic writings, which contained allusions to the Messiah, who was the comfort and hope of all believers. To this, afterwards, were added readings from the gospels, and still later, from the epistles. Their purpose was to make all Christians acquainted with the contents of the sacred Scriptures, and they were so much the more important, as in those times it was not possible that the Bible could be put into the hands of all, for what, in our days, the art of printing effects with incredible rapidity and ease, could then only be done slowly, and with great labour, by means of writing; and it was therefore natural that these copies of the sacred books were scarce and dear, so that the greater number of poorer Christians could not provide themselves with them. Thus it came, that, as the majority were prevented from reading them, frequent hearing of them was obliged to stand in the place of personal reading. For the rest, they were read in the languages understood by all the hearers; and this in most of the Roman states, was either Greek or Latin; and where these were not understood by all, interpreters were provided, who immediately translated it into the language of the country, that it might be generally understood, for, had this not been done, the purpose of general edification would not have been answered.

The reading of the holy Scriptures is not entirely wanting among us, my brethren, but all that is done in this respect is manifestly insufficient, for it does not answer the purpose of making our hearers acquainted with the whole rich treasure of the Bible; and it were to be wished that we had institutions for especial readings of God's word, so as to spread the acquaintance with the full contents of the holy Scriptures. All that is done, the reading of the Sunday lessons, and the epistle at the altar, and the portions which are selected for our sermons, is too little for this purpose. But this can only make us press on you more urgently the necessity

of reading the Bible for yourselves. "Search the Scriptures," is our Lord's own exhortation, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they that testify of me." And how easy has it been made for our Christians to build themselves up in this way, in their family circles, in their most holy faith. The Bible is so generally spread abroad, and in every one one's hand, or, at least, the possession of this precious treasure is attended with so few difficulties, that those who do not possess it have only themselves to blame. And the reading of the Bible is not, as in the Romish church, forbidden or confined, but much rather impressively inculcated. We demand it of you, ye grown up Christians, we demand it of your children, whose instruction you have committed to us. We wish nothing so heartily, as that each Christian should be perfectly familiar with his Bible, and be able "to give a reason for the hope that is in him." We rejoice heartily when we see that the reading of the Bible is a dear occupation, a true pleasure, a deeply felt necessity. We complain that the want of acquaintance with it, among many, both small and great, both young and old, is so vast, that multitudes, who call themselves Christians, know not what is in the Bible, and are unable to give a reason for their faith, because, since they have left school, and been confirmed, they have entirely neglected to occupy themselves with the word of God. Is it strange, that, with such indifference to that which ought to be with us the dearest and holiest thing we have, harshness, sinfulness, common and earthly feelings, and love for the world and its vanities, should get the upper hand? How wilt thou live according to the Scriptures, if they be unknown to thee? How can God's word enlighten thy spirit, sanctify thy heart and life, comfort thee in thy sorrows, strengthen and keep thee in the contest with sin, if thou avoidest and altogether neglectest all attention to it? O, my brethren, let this word "dwell abundantly in you;" read it, learn it, let it be the daily food of your hearts; your own salvation is at stake, it hath power to save your souls. Would that every one of

you were a Timothy, of whom we could boast, that, "from a child you had known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ?"

II. This reading of the Scriptures was followed in the congregations of the early Christians by brief, and, at first, very simple expositions, in a familiar style, such as occurred at the moment to the speaker, and which were intended for nothing more than an explanation and application of the sacred Scriptures. On this head Justin Martyr informs us, "The head of the community gives an exhortation, and requires of the congregation to attempt in their lives to follow the good lessons that had been read to them." These expositions, which, like the reading, had been transferred from the Jewish synagogues into the Christian church, and of which we find more than one example in the sacred Scriptures, had a double purpose. They were partly intended to explain what was read to men of feebler powers, partly to exhort all the hearers to practise and follow it. Among the Greeks, who cultivated the field of oratory with especial industry, the sermon early obtained a greater extension, and assumed an important place in their church devotional exercises.

The same, also, is the case with us, my brethren. The sermon forms the chief constituent part of our divine service, and its purpose is the same as in the early Christian church. Its object is to explain and apply the text of the Bible, in order "to build up" the hearers "on their most holy faith," that they may be strengthened and preserved in the love of God, and confidence "in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." They must, therefore, always proceed from the word of God, and rest thereon, as on a firm and immoveable ground; and as it is to be a Christian sermon, Christ, according to his holy person, and divine work, must constitute the keystone and chief object of it, and we who hold this sacred office of preacher, must never forget to attend to the principle of the apostle, "I de-

termine to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." It were, indeed, a grievous error, if, in the sermon of a Christian service, the discourse were not of Christ and his truth, which he has revealed to us for our salvation ; and unhappily there have been times when men have fallen into this error. God be praised, those times are over, which were called the times of enlightenment, while they should have been entitled times of darkness, because, through their influence the light of Christian truth was actually darkened. The Lord is again preached amongst us, and in his name "repentance and forgiveness of sins," as he himself has ordained ; but unhappily there are not wanting such as appear not to know that this is the root of all Christian doctrine, and who cannot comprehend what is the essence of a Christian sermon. They ask only for fine sermons, for such as by their adornment of speech please the ear, not for Christian sermons, whose end is to edify, to rouse and confirm faith in Christ Jesus, to convert sinners, and renew their hearts through the power of truth after the image of God. And this proceeds from their want of acquaintance with the Bible. Many are ignorant what is written there, and consequently what should form the foundation of a sermon. To many, also, the Bible is a closed book ; they cannot read, and therefore it would be a very desirable thing, and should be to us a source of great joy, if especial times were appointed for reading the Bible, and also for explaining and applying it. By this means the understanding of the Scriptures would be essentially advanced among us, for all that is done in this respect in the instruction of youth, in the public services, and in the sermon, and all, indeed, that can be done there, is too little, especially when we reflect how little many Christians regard the church, what indescribable indifference is shewn by many at this day to the preaching of the gospel. They think it no business of theirs to read and understand the Bible. Their minds are directed only to things earthly, common, and worldly, and they care not that they have an immortal soul, for which there is no other

nourishment or confirmation than God's word. They therefore reject the few opportunities they have of "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," and never, or very rarely, take part in our religious exercises. But how, under such circumstances, can the Christian life advance, if men so neglect their church life, and make so little use of the means of instruction and edification offered them? Or where are the thousands who compose our community when the bell calls to divine service? They are employed in their business, in their occupations, or seeking for pleasure and amusements, and there is but a comparatively small number of Christians who attend the preaching of the divine word. And as the old shun the church, so do the young, who have the example of indifference before their eyes. As the fathers and mothers neglect our assemblies, so do the children turn their backs on them, and, it is natural, that Christian experience is diminished among us, that the love of God is lost, and the striving and seeking for heavenly things, crushed and oppressed by love for earthly things, and the pleasures of the world. O, would that the example of the first Christians would shame and rouse us, my brethren! They continued daily, and with one mind, in the temple. Their example cries to us with warning voice, "Neglect not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is."

III. Therefore, "dearly beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." Prayer, also, was an especial constituent of the worship of the early Christians. It was the soul of their whole lives, and therefore how could it be wanting at their public assemblies for divine worship? "We assemble," says Tertullian, "in order to surround God at the same time with a strong, united, praying band. Such force is, indeed, agreeable to God. But we do not pray for ourselves alone, we pray for the emperor, the magistracy, the rulers, for all men, for public peace, for the church's welfare." See here, how those Christians proved through their conduct that they had taken to heart

the apostolic precept, "I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, should be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour." At the close of the service the bishop pronounced the thanksgiving for all the gifts and services which the Lord had bestowed, and this prayer was sealed by a full and united Amen of the whole congregation.

Congregational prayer forms among us also a chief constituent of divine service, my brethren. The minister of the Lord raises it at the altar, in the name of the whole congregation, to the throne of God. It begins with a confession of sin, and a prayer for grace; it proceeds to a thanksgiving to God for all his benefits to body and soul with which he has blessed us; it praises Him especially for his great goodness, for the gifts of his holy word; it then becomes an earnest application for the divine assistance to preach His name, and for power and grace to walk conformably to his word in righteousness and holiness, until at last we shall come to praise Him in the heavenly community of the elect. And when the sermon is ended, we unite ourselves anew for prayer, and thank the Lord for the aid he has given us, and close our service with supplications for the good of the church, for our king and country, for the servants of the state, for the peace of the world, for all men, and then conclude with a prayer for a blessed end, and a reception into the heavenly kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we finally call on God in the words which he himself taught us. Then the whole congregation is dismissed with the blessing of the Lord.

But if we do not always follow the same order in these prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, and if in some churches the order is changed, and the whole liturgy precedes the sermon, while in others the proper intercessions follow the sermon, yet all this must be re-

garded as by no means essential. We have no need of perfect uniformity of forms, except in as far as it is needful to maintain the essence of all divine service, as it is set forth in our text, when it says, "Build yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying with the Holy Ghost." But with this we must ever unite that essential point in the worship of God, "that he is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth." In the form the greatest liberty may be allowed. Thus, we need not consider it as of any importance, that in one place the liturgy is accompanied by a choir, in another not. But where choral music is introduced, it would be very much to be desired that the whole congregation, which generally is quite inactive, would itself form the chorus, and, as in the primitive church, would itself pronounce the Amen, after the reading of the prayer, or at least would join in singing with the choir. The choir now takes the place of the congregation; but I think it would be far more solemn and exalting, if the whole congregation, as with one mouth, were to answer Amen to the prayer of the minister of God. Thus, when we step to the altar, and commence the service with the prayer, "The Lord be with you," you should all join with the choir in singing, "And with thy spirit;" and when again we call on you, "Lift up your hearts," then should the whole congregation of believers answer with the choir, "We lift them up unto the Lord." That which, in most places, stands in the way of an arrangement so decidedly edifying, is the neglect of church singing, and this remark leads us to the conclusion of our subject.

IV. You will recollect, that, at the commencement, we named singing as one part of the ordinances of divine service among the early Christians. In this respect, also, the believers in the gospel adopted a practice that prevailed among the Jews. Paul frequently exhorts the first Christian churches to spiritual songs, as when he writes to the Ephesians, "Be filled with the spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spi-

ritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord:" and when he exhorts the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Church singing is especially fitted to produce a deep and overpowering impression on the mind, and edify the heart. This the Christians knew, and therefore it was never wanting at their divine service. They originally sung partly the psalms of the Old Testament, and partly songs of thanksgiving and praise to God and Christ, composed for this purpose, and thereby they sought to exalt the simple church solemnities.

We need scarcely mention, that church singing occupies now a chief place in our form of worship, and, on account of its importance, deservedly does so. And what great cause have we to thank God for the rich and glorious collection of church songs which our German nation possesses! The Reformation of the sixteenth century exercised a decisive influence on the formation of such songs, and we still sing with rapture, and to our real edification, the powerful hymns of faith of our Luther, and the pithy hymns of other pious writers of earlier or later times. Would that we had not also to lament the sad neglect into which church singing has fallen amongst us, and which is so mournfully evinced by the prevailing ignorance of many melodies and tunes! Whence does this arise, you will ask? Partly from the neglect of church worship of so many Christians, who never attend our services. How shall they learn the tunes when they never hear them? This partly arises from the neglect of family religious exercises. Some years back, and probably you remember it still, in the times of your childhood and youth, some years back there was singing in houses and families; children learned from their parents, and became familiar with the tunes, before they went to church. In the schools, too, formerly nothing but hymns were sung, and, however imperfect and unmelodious the sing-

ing was, yet they became initiated in the tunes. Then there were many beautiful institutions, such as the public schools for choral singing, which many, I doubt not, remember with delight from the times when they were not out of fashion. The spirit of the times has done away with all this. Spiritual music and spiritual songs have had to yield to worldly and common ones. Family religious exercises have, to a great extent ceased, and little is now done in the schools to advance church singing, although this within the last few years has been again improving. Whence, then, shall proceed the practice in singing our spiritual songs? We are obliged to keep to the most common tunes, and many a glorious and beautiful hymn remains unsung, because the melody to which it was composed is unknown, and the *united* worship is interrupted, if we choose it. O, let therefore, next to your bibles and catechisms, your hymn-books be your household book for edification, and introduce these family exercises among yourselves once more! Let your children learn our beautiful hymns by heart, and sing them together with them, that they may become acquainted with the melodies at home! In particular, do you who take great pains to have your sons and daughters instructed in music, take care not to exclude spiritual music, which contributes so essentially to edification, fits the soul for devotion, raises the heart to God, comforts and makes glad the soul. But singing alone is indeed not enough, it must, as Luther says, “be not only with the mouth, without all understanding, but with devotion, spiritual, and out of the ground of the heart.” We must be full of the spirit, my brethren, and if we are full of the spirit, the holy spirit, then shall we have our pleasure in the word of God, in the preaching of the gospel, in prayer and singing, then we shall not call to you in vain, “build yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.” Therefore, we pray thee, our kind and heavenly Father, that thou wouldst fill us all with thy holy spirit, that our reading, hearing, praying, and singing, may be pleasing and acceptable to thee, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XV.

OF THE DIVINE SERVICES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

BLESSED be the Lord our God, who, according to his great mercy, hath saved us through the path of regeneration and renovation by the holy spirit, which He has poured out upon us abundantly by Jesus Christ our Saviour, that, by His grace we may become heirs of eternal life, by the hope that He is faithful who has promised. Amen.

The hymn which we have this day sung together, my brethren, will have suggested to you what will be the subject of my discourse. The sacrament of holy baptism will form the subject of my observations to-day. We have been for some weeks depicting the ecclesiastical life of Christians in the first centuries, and we have, on the last occasion, reminded you of the sacred ordinances which formed the chief component parts of their public worship. In their exercises of religious worship they particularly provided for edification and instruction, and therefore they attributed a peculiar importance to the study of the divine word, as the surest and most efficacious means towards a growth in knowledge and holiness. The reading of the holy Scriptures, the preaching of the word, singing and prayer, were therefore the most prominent objects of their congregational services, as is the case also at the present time among us, so that we may with truth venture to affirm, that our divine service, in its principal features, does not differ from that of the first Christians.

Next, however, to the study of the divine word, the celebration of the holy sacraments occupied a high sta-

tion in the ecclesiastical life of the first Christians. You know, my brethren, that there are two ordinances which we are accustomed to call sacraments, viz. holy baptism and the holy communion. The divine founder of Christianity himself appointed and ordained both, as blessed pledges of our communion with Him, and our participation of the eternal goods and joys of His kingdom. By holy baptism we are admitted into His covenant of grace and peace. It is the solemn consecration in order to fellowship with Him, and with all God's children, and, as such, the highest blessing which we can obtain, because it is a pledge of our participation in the redemption which He has made for us, and, at the same time, makes the duty of following Him most urgent, wherefore St Peter calls it, "The answer of a good conscience toward God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." He, therefore, who is consecrated to God by baptism, must consider himself to be a member of a community which has received grace and redemption, and is sanctified by the Holy Ghost. The celebration of the holy Lord's Supper, by which we proclaim the Lord's death, is intended to express our continual abiding in this blessed and sanctifying fellowship with our Redeemer, and the continual appropriation in faith of the eternal goods and blessings of His kingdom. This sacrament is to us a precious pledge of His grace, and of the perfect salvation which he has won for sinful men; and as he gives us himself to feed upon in that glorious feast, so are we bound to take on ourselves His spirit and His life really and in truth, that we may be entirely one with Him, and exclaim with St Paul, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

We will now consider how the Christians of the first ages regarded with the greatest awe these two precious bequests, which the Lord, when He departed, left behind to His church; how they recognised the significance and importance of them; how their influence on the whole life, and the connection of the divine with the external ordinance was deeply and livingly felt by them; and, lastly, how these holy ordinances were ad-

ministered in the church. It will naturally appear from my discourse, in how far, in this respect, our present church life agrees with that of the first Christians, and how far it differs from it. But as the importance of the subject requires that we should consider each sacrament separately, we will devote this day to meditation on holy baptism ; and let it be our earnest prayer that the Lord would deign to bless us in our task.

TEXT. And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ; and lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world. Amen.—St Matthew, xxviii. 18–20.

When our divine Redeemer spoke these words to his disciples, my brethren, he was about to leave them, and go unto his Father. The great work was ended : the time for his exaltation had arrived. He soared up to the right hand of the majesty of God, where he is now enthroned in eternal glory, as the Lord of heaven and earth, as the dispenser of the holy gifts which he has obtained for this sinful world, as the head of his faithful church, redeemed by his blood. He, therefore, declares in the text, “ All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” By virtue of this power he now commissions his disciples to go among all nations, to preach and baptize, to extend his kingdom upon earth, and bring men into this kingdom by proclaiming to them the gospel, to consecrate them as his followers, and bind them to serve and obey His holy word and ordinance. “ Go, therefore,” he says, “ and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” At the same time He gives them, and all who should believe on Him by their word, a decided and express

promise, that, though about to leave the earth, and thereby withdraw from them His visible presence, He yet would remain in an uninterrupted, but invisible, communion with them, so that nothing of the happiness, which his love had bought them should fail them. "And lo," he continues, "lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world." Into this communion with the glorified Redeemer, and the whole church of believers, we are admitted by the sacrament of holy baptism. By this rite we are consecrated as his disciples, and solemnly pledged to follow him; and by means of this sacrament, we become partakers of his grace, in order to our regeneration and sanctification. We shall this day, my brethren, occupy ourselves in meditations on holy baptism, and that with special reference to the church life of Christians in the first centuries; and we shall not fail to remark much which will bear on our present life as churchmen, and on the position which the sacrament of baptism holds in it.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. When Christianity was first introduced into the world by the holy apostles, no very extended preparation preceded baptism. If they were Jews who desired to be received into fellowship with the Lord, nothing farther was required of them than the confession of faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Upon this profession the apostles consecrated those three thousand who believed at the first Christian Pentecost, as disciples of Him that was crucified and had risen again; and Philip baptized the Ethiopian chamberlain when he solemnly professed, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." If they were heathens who desired to pass over to Christianity, they were obliged to declare their faith in one God, and in Jesus Christ, the Saviour, and on this declaration they were at once baptized. But by and by it was considered necessary to impart to those who desired to be received into the Christian church a

more careful instruction, and to examine them more strictly, in order to restrain unworthy persons from becoming members of the community. This instruction ordinarily lasted two years, and those who took part in it were entitled hearers, or *catechumens*. In the public worship of God they were only permitted to hear the reading of the holy Scriptures and the sermon. There was an office in the church instituted especially for this instruction, to which distinguished and learned men were generally appointed, in order that they might be able to meet the reproaches and doubts of educated heathens. They were called *catechetes*, and there arose in Alexandria, especially through the influence of Origen, a distinct, and afterwards very famous school, where these catechetes were trained.

But since, among us, infants are baptized, my brethren, it follows from the nature of the thing, that instruction in the truths of our sacred Christian faith must follow baptism, and cannot be imparted till the understanding is somewhat ripened. It begins, therefore, when the children have attained the age of thirteen or fourteen years, although, unfortunately, some cases occur where they have advanced to the age of seventeen, eighteen, or even twenty years, without instruction, in consequence of some inexcusable negligence, and where both with young and old the most wretched indifference towards Christian instruction is exhibited. According to law, this instruction of catechumens lasts for a year; but we are gratified to find that many receive it for two or three years, and equally lament, on the other hand, that not a few, especially of the poorer classes, are withdrawn too early from this instruction. Do ye, my Christian brethren, who are parents, consider earnestly the great importance of this instruction for your children, and its influence on the whole of their after lives, and be it your peculiar care that they collect in the school the knowledge which is previously needful, and become at home, under your guidance, in some measure acquainted with the word of God, that they may be able afterwards to attend our instructions with surer and more

blessed effects. Urge them, at the same time, to uninterrupted and regular attendance, and take them yourselves to God's house to listen to the sermon, and thus will the feeling for things that are high and heavenly be cherished within them, and love towards God be nourished in their souls, to your joy, and their everlasting happiness. They will grow up as "trees of righteousness" to the glory of the Lord; they will be ornaments of the ecclesiastical and civil community, and have throughout their whole lives rich comfort and blessing from the word of the Lord. But, alas, how often have we cause to complain of ignorance, roughness, and lack of love for instruction in our youth? How often are children neglected from their births, and ruined before they are brought to us? How often are they wanting in the most necessary points of knowledge, because they are not sent regularly to our schools? How often do we look upon them with pain and anxious care for their future lives, because we know that the poison of sin has already penetrated their hearts? O, let him who can improve or aid in this matter put his hand to the work, for the Lord exhorts us most urgently and earnestly, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven;" and commands so impressively in our text not only us the ministers of his word, but all who have means and opportunity to work with us, "Teach them to observe all things which I have commanded you."

II. But let us return to baptism in the early times of the Christian church, my brethren. The simple confession of faith, which was originally made at this ordinance, afterwards became more extensive. It was made to contain the more essential parts of Christianity, in which all the churches agreed. It was generally called the apostles' sermon, or the apostles' tradition, not probably because the apostles were considered to be its authors, but because men were convinced that it contained the doctrine which the apostles inculcated by word and writing. It is that apostolic creed now in

use in our church, which forms the second head of the Lutheran catechism. This creed was imparted by word of mouth to the catechumens, as containing the most essential doctrines of Christianity, whether they were already acquainted or not with the truths of the gospel by their own inquiry and reading in the holy Scriptures, and they were obliged publicly to profess it at their baptism. A baptismal vow was, in later times, after the second century, added to the baptismal profession of faith. The view which they took of the matter was, that the person to be baptized was about to depart from the kingdom of Satan, whom he had, up to this time, as a heathen, served in sinful lusts, and was about to enter the kingdom of God, and of Jesus Christ. He was, therefore, solemnly to renounce all society with that kingdom. This was done by his grasping the bishop's hand, and vowing that he renounced the devil and all his pomp,—in which they had especial regard to the heathen spectacles and the like,—and all his angels,—in which they doubtless had respect to the idols, which they considered as evil spirits, who had led men astray. This baptismal vow they were wont to call the Christian soldier's oath, because they thereby bound themselves to live and fight as soldiers of God and Jesus Christ.

The vow which our children make solemnly before God and the church, when they renew their baptismal vow at confirmation, is similar to this, for they bind themselves “to renounce the devil and all his works, and all that belongs to him, and to give themselves up to the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to be faithful to Him in faith and obedience even to their end.” Behold, Christians, this is the answer of a good conscience, which we have all made to God in holy baptism; this is the vow which we have all taken at our consecration, although not in the same words and expressions! Have we remained faithful to this vow? Have we really and heartily renounced all ungodly things, and all worldly lusts; and do we find our highest and only pleasure and joy in serving God in righteous-

ness and holiness, as is pleasing unto Him, and in following Christ in faith and obedience? Or does our conscience condemn us, and the spirit of the Lord convict us, of having broken our baptismal covenant, of having denied Christ, and turned ourselves aside, through want of faith, to the world and the service of Satan? "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Perfectly distinct from this baptismal vow was the so called *exorcism*, or formula of expulsion of the evil spirit, which was pronounced over the person to be baptized. We find the first certain traces of this no earlier than the second half of the third century, when the desire for that which was external, and gratifying the senses, and love for empty ceremony was daily increasing and becoming more prevalent in the ordinances of religion. They imagined that unbelievers were really and actually possessed by the evil spirit, and applied to the baptism of all heathens, as though the evil spirit dwelt in them bodily, the formula of exorcism which they were accustomed to use over those who were called demoniacs, or possessed. Neither the Scriptures, nor the early church, knew any thing of such notions; and we have therefore rightly given up this formula of exorcism at the baptism of our children, and use at this sacrament no other formula than that which the Lord himself has commanded, as we read in the words of our text, where the Redeemer says, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." In these few words the Lord intended to express the essence of his whole divine work for the salvation of sinful men, the essence of the new covenant made by Him, namely, the relation of man's whole life to a God, who has revealed himself as a Father to fallen men through his Son, and has imparted to them his Spirit to regenerate and sanctify them. These words of our Lord were, therefore, peculiarly calculated to serve for the formula of baptism, in as far as by them was expressed the essence of the true

worship of God, as he has revealed himself to us by his Son, in a heart and life hallowed by His spirit.

III. Originally baptism was performed by a total immersion in water, whereby it was intended to signify the death and burial of the old man, and the resurrection of the new man to a divine life. This St Paul expresses, when he says, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." It was only with sick persons, and where necessity required, that they departed from this form, and administered to them baptism by mere sprinkling in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, as is now generally customary among us. There were indeed many narrow minded Christians who cleaved too strictly to the outward form, who considered such a baptism by sprinkling to be imperfect and invalid, but Bishop Cyprian impressively declares himself against such a superstitious fancy, by saying, "In the sacraments of salvation, when necessity compels, and God gives his grace, the divine ordinance, although externally mutilated, conveys to the believer the whole. Or if any one believes that he has gained nothing, if he has only been sprinkled with the water of salvation, he must not be deceived, but if he recover his health, must be baptized again. But if those who have once been hallowed by the church's baptism cannot be baptized again, why should their faith and the grace of God be turned into sorrow?" As time advanced, the external ceremonies at holy baptism were constantly multiplied, in which men at first assuredly did not mean to increase the holiness of the sacrament by pomp and ceremonies, but only wished to express visibly to the senses the thoughts and feelings which filled the soul of the believer. But meanwhile they ran the risk of putting out of sight the real essence of the divine ordinance, by laying too great weight

on external customs, and this danger did not fail to come upon the church. According to the teaching of the gospel, the whole Christian church forms one spiritual priesthood. And, as in the Old Testament, anointing was the sign of consecration to the priesthood, this form was transferred to Christianity, and the newly baptized persons were anointed with an oil especially blessed for that purpose, in order thereby to indicate their consecration to the spiritual priesthood. About the middle of the third century, this custom appears to have become an essential part of the baptismal ceremony. In several churches, besides this anointing, a mixture of milk and honey was given to the baptized, partly as a visible representation, that, through baptism, they had become children of God, partly as a spiritual explanation of the promise of the land flowing with milk and honey, whereby was signified the heavenly country to which all the baptized belonged. Then they were received into the church with the first kiss of brotherhood, and the greeting of peace,—of peace with God, in whom they now had a share, together with all other Christians,—and from this time they were entitled to greet other Christians with this sign of brotherhood.

Another custom, older than the anointing, which we have just mentioned, was the imposition of hands, accompanied by prayer, with which the ordinance of baptism was concluded, and which has continued down to our times. It was a mark of religious consecration, borrowed from the Jews, which was made use of in various instances. Whilst the apostles or heads of the church laid their hands upon the persons baptized, they called upon the Lord that he would give his blessing on the sacred ordinance then completed, would bring to fulfilment the meaning conveyed by it, and pour his spirit upon the baptized. All this had reference to that chief thing, without which no one can be a Christian, the birth to a new life in God, the baptism of the Spirit, which was expressed to the senses by baptism with water. But in the course of the second century the false idea

gained ground, that the giving of the Holy Ghost was chiefly connected with the imposition of hands. Thus was this by degrees separated from baptism, and men, appealing to falsely interpreted passages of holy writ, believed that they must allow to the bishops alone the right of confirming the baptism already conferred by other ministers, by the imposition of their hands. Hence the bishops were obliged from time to time to travel over their dioceses, in order to give to the baptized what is entitled *confirmation*, which was afterwards exalted to a separate sacrament, as it still continues in the Romish church, where the bishop alone has the right to administer it.

IV. "He who believeth and is baptized," says the Lord, "shall be saved." As faith and baptism are constantly so closely connected together, men might reasonably hesitate to baptize infants, inasmuch as faith would with them be impossible. Neither has the Lord himself ordained infant baptism. As little also can we prove strictly and convincingly that the apostles baptized children, although we know that they baptized whole families, and we might justly suppose that there were children among them. But a number of texts, the express command of our Lord, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," the deeply felt need of receiving into purifying and hallowing communion with its Saviour the child conceived and born in sin, and to assure to him the blessings which a union with His church offers to him, the contemplation of the wonderful workings of the spirit of God on man, even in the earliest stages of his existence, a reference to the rite of circumcision in the Old Testament, by which the infant was, eight days after his birth, received into the divine covenant,—all this and much beside speak too strongly for infant baptism, for us not to attribute its origin to apostolic times. Even the opposition which Tertullian, in the second century, raised against it, is a strong proof

that it had long been a practice in the church; and in the third century it was universally adopted.

The first passage, which appears to have direct reference to this subject, is to be found in Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, in the second century. "Christ," he says, "came to redeem all, all who are born again by him, infants, children, boys, youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, and became an infant to infants, sanctifying infants, he became a child among children, among youths a youth, in order to sanctify them, and at the same time to be to them an example of piety and obedience." It is here especially important to observe that infants (*infantes*) are particularly distinguished from children (*parvuli*), and, as such, are marked out as those whom the Lord sanctifies, in as far as they are born again through Him. It would be difficult to suppose that any thing but baptism is designated here under the new birth, especially as St Paul calls it "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." In this we find the essentially Christian idea, from which infant baptism must almost of its own accord have been developed, the more Christianity penetrated into domestic life, namely, that Christ had sanctified human nature from its earliest stage by the divine life which he revealed in it, and communicated to it, and seem consequently to be fully justified in consecrating our children, immediately on their entrance into this temporal existence, to their Redeemer by holy baptism, that their whole life may thereby become dedicated to the Lord.

On this account it was that in the third century Cyprian so earnestly urged, that the baptism of children should not be postponed, but performed immediately after their birth, in order that the grace of God might not be for a moment withheld from them. "If anything," he writes, "could bar men from the attainment of grace, it would be with those who were grown up and aged, their grievous sins. But if the grossest sinners, after they have attained to faith, receive for-

givenness of sins, and are not shut out from baptism and grace, how much less may we reject an infant, which, being newly born, cannot have sinned, except in as far as from its natural descent from Adam it has contracted the contagion of death from its very birth, and which therefore can the more easily obtain forgiveness of sins, as the sins that are remitted to it are not its own, but those of another." What would the pious father say in these days, if he could see how Christian parents, through indifference and frivolity, delay months and years long, before they consecrate their children to the Redeemer by holy baptism? How impressively would he upbraid this wickedness, which can only proceed from a perfectly mistaken notion of the meaning and holiness of the sacrament!

Many grown persons, on the other hand, deferred their baptism, in the early Christian church, as long as possible, and it was not always mere procrastination that caused them so to do. They attributed to this sacrament a magic power of expiating sins, and, proceeding on this delusion, deferred their baptism, in order to give themselves up in the meanwhile more freely to their sins, in the hope, that, even in the hour of death, they could obtain forgiveness and remission, and thus enter fully purified into eternal life. And among us, unhappily, there are not wanting light-minded Christians, who put off their repentance and turning to God from one time to another, in order to continue to serve the world, and, as they express it, to enjoy life properly. In the meantime, they comfort themselves with the thought, that, at a later period, perhaps even on their dying beds, when they are no longer in a condition to sin, they can sufficiently prepare for eternity, and care for the salvation of their souls. Alas, how unsafe and dangerous is so late a repentance and conversion! No! To-day thou art alive, to-day be converted! Before the morning comes, all things may be changed! Woe to him who lives thus frivolously! How hardly will such an one enter into the kingdom of God! For, to sin cal-

culating on grace, is to sin wilfully, and “to those who sin wilfully there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment.”

It was probably also infant baptism which afforded the first reason for the appointment of sponsors or godfathers, for as the children could not themselves declare their confession of faith and their baptismal vow, others were obliged to do it in their name, and these persons bound themselves to provide that the children should afterwards be rightly instructed in Christianity, and brought up to a godly life, and hence they were called sponsors. How weighty, therefore, is the office of a sponsor, and how careful should all parents be to select for this holy purpose only really faithful, pious, and righteous Christians, from whose assistance they may claim, if there be need, a true blessing for their children in the work of instruction! But alas, the office of sponsor is now no longer esteemed according to its signification and importance, and there are neither wanting unthinking godfathers, who look at it only as a temporary testimony of respect, nor unthinking parents who only think of gain, and therefore invite a multitude of sponsors to the baptism of their children. O ye parents and sponsors, beware of such a lowering and degradation of this sacrament, and when in holy baptism you dedicate your children to the Lord, reflect, above all things, on the grace accorded them therein, and on the duties laid thereby upon you, and which the Lord lays impressively before you, when he says in relation to these children, “Teach them to observe all things which I have commanded you,” and pray to Him for his aid, that you may, both by precept and example, bring them up in “the fear and nurture of the Lord!” But let us all, my brethren, who have once been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and thereby been bound to know and honour the Triune God, let us all this day praise God anew for this his mercy, that he has called us to be partakers in his kingdom, and inheritors of eternal life, and let us renew

in silence our baptismal covenant with Him, and call upon him from the ground of the heart, to give us strength to walk before him, as baptized and consecrated to Him, in righteousness and pureness of life, and to be true to Him in faith and obedience even to the end, that he may one day again acknowledge us as His, and receive us to his eternal happiness and glory. And this may He do of His great mercy! Amen.

SERMON XVI.

OF THE DIVINE SERVICES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

O LORD JESUS, make us indeed worthy of this thy salvation, and work mightily in our souls by thy holy spirit, that we may entirely yield ourselves up to thee in the right faith, and take no rest, till we can say with truth, “ we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us.” Amen.

The ecclesiastical life of Christians in the first centuries reached its climax in the sacrament of the altar, my brethren, and the celebration of this holy supper formed an essential portion of their divine service. You are aware that it continues so still among us,—and how could it be otherwise? Surely this precious meal is the seal of the covenant of grace, which the Lord has concluded with every soul that believes. In this meal he imparts himself to us, and while he penetrates our whole being with His spirit, he glorifies us into his own holy, divine form, and graciously gives to us that fullness of happiness, which streams forth unintermittingly from Him upon those that are His, to bathe and refresh their hearts with the peace of God, to strengthen and advance their inward life, and to keep them in his communion unto eternal life, so that a faithful Christian may rightly and properly acknowledge at this meal “ My beloved is mine, and I am his.” He is in us and we are in Him: he gives himself to us, and we give ourselves up to Him,—and by the power of this inward union with him, we become partakers of all the blessings of his divine love, both for time and eternity. It is therefore incomprehensible how so many, who call

themselves Christians, so little regard this holy sacrament, and can persuade themselves entirely to renounce participation in it, and we cannot be judging too severely in supposing that "they know not what they do," they neither know themselves and their true spiritual wants, nor do they know the Lord, nor have any conception of the salvation to which, by communion with him, they may attain; for, were this the case, they must love the Lord, and a heart full of love must urge them to celebrate the feast of love, and in it to seal the covenant of love with their Redeemer.

But far more grievous, my brethren, is the circumstance, that this very mysterious and awfully sacred solemnity, which the Lord established only with the view to secure the most blessed union of believers with himself and one another, should have led to the most unhappy schisms and divisions in the church. For, instead of celebrating the sacrament in childlike simplicity and faith as He has enjoined, Christians have resorted to all sorts of useless and refined quibbles, and, having no love, have striven about the meaning of the words which he used in ordaining it, and about the manner and fashion of the presence of Jesus Christ in the holy supper, as though the blessing of the sacrament depended on ideas and notions, and not rather on the right and faithful disposition of the soul and direction of the heart. From this cause have all kinds of divisions arisen, and one says, "I am Zuinglian;" another, "I am Calvinistic;" a third, "I am Lutheran." Luther, in particular, is made by many to serve as a pretext for cherishing the love of contention, and perpetuating divisions which ought never to be among Christians, and, least of all, in the celebration of the feast of love, when all men should rather take to heart Luther's glorious declaration in the Catechism: "He is worthy and ready for the celebration of the sacrament, who has faith in the words, 'given for you, shed for you, for the remission of sins.'" But he who believes not, or doubts these words, is unworthy and unfit, for the word which is addressed to you demands en-

tirely believing hearts." Let us hold to this, my brethren, and instead of striving in an unchristian manner, let us show our Lutheranism, or rather our Christianity, not only by following Christ in thought and life, but especially with regard to this holy supper, lay hold of his holy office of mediator in faith, and mutually urge each other on to love ; for otherwise we shall only be depriving ourselves of the blessing which the Lord has promised, not to those who love strife and quarrelling, but to those who heartily desire to be saved by his grace, and who in faith and love dedicate themselves to Him.

May such thoughts be furthered among us by this day's meditation, my brethren, whose object will be to point out to you how the early Christians regarded the sacrament, and celebrated it ! Among them we find in this point, what is so often unfortunately wanting among ourselves, namely, " forbearance in love, and an endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." In later times, this childlike, simple, and humble faith began to disappear, and instead arose all sorts of doctrinal contentions, which led to unhallowed divisions in life, whilst men, with all their differences of doctrine, views and opinions, ought to have preserved love in their lives as the highest and noblest thing ; for the Lord hath said, " Hereby shall men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Least of all should there arise any contention concerning the holy supper within the evangelical church, because all members of that church, whether they be called Lutheran or reformed, agree in all essential points, for all consider Jesus Christ as the only and eternal ground of salvation, and all are really united in the confession, " that we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This confession, and no dogma concerning the holy supper, is the foundation on which the evangelical church rests, and therefore it is neither right nor proper, to contend with so little love about other points. Let us, then, be one in love, my brethren, and may the

meditations we are now about to enter into concerning this feast of love, and its celebration among the first Christians, awaken and give new life to the spirit of love within us; and let us all implore God for his blessing.

TEXT. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sin.—St Matthew, xxvi. 26–28.

The words we have just read, represent to us the institution of the holy supper, and with relation to them let us consider,

1. How the Christians of the first centuries regarded the holy feast; and,
2. How they used to celebrate it.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

1. “With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.” With this declaration the Lord entered into the circle of his disciples at the last paschal celebration. He was about to leave them, and to offer himself for them, and for the salvation of the whole world of sinners, and thus this last paschal feast was also the feast of his departure. But although he withdrew from them his bodily and visible presence, yet they were not to imagine that they were entirely and forever separated from him. On the contrary, he promised them that “he would be with them always, even unto the end of the world;” he would not, indeed, be visible among them as at this last feast, but he would as truly dwell invisibly in the midst of them by His Spirit, and work among them more powerfully and with richer blessings than before: he would, by virtue of this His spiritual communion with them, impart to them himself

and all his heavenly goods. He therefore made use of the celebration of the last paschal meal for the ordinance of his holy supper. This feast was to be to them a blessed pledge, and a firm seal of his continual presence among them, and of their uninterrupted communion with him, and therefore he expressly commanded them to celebrate it in remembrance of him. The Lord made use of the Jewish passover in the institution of his sacrament, as being the fundamental covenant feast of the whole Mosaic religion. But as in the one the regard to the bodily and earthly blessings of God prevailed, so in the holy supper reference is more had to the spiritual and heavenly blessings of God. The Jewish passover was a celebration of thanksgiving, and had reference to two things: first, In regard to the earthly gifts and benefits which the Almighty Creator pours forth upon all men in nature and the fruits of the earth; and, secondly, In regard to the peculiar blessings and guidance of the grace of God with which the chosen people were honoured when they were rescued from their Egyptian bondage. The Jewish master of the house, therefore, at this meal, was wont, with prayers and thanksgiving, to distribute bread and wine to the assembled guests, to the praise of the Almighty, who had given to men meat and drink, and then reminded them especially of the mercy which God had shown his people Israel, when, by his servant Moses, he led them with a strong hand out of Egypt into the promised land. This extraordinary goodness they were bound ever to remember with the most sincere feelings of gratitude; the bread was to remind them of the bread of affliction which their fathers had eaten in Egypt, and of the heavenly manna with which the Lord had wonderfully fed them in the wilderness, and the cup was to be to them a cup of joy, a challenge to praise God for their happy rescue from the bondage of Egypt, and therefore it was the cup of praise or thanksgiving.

Taking this Jewish supper for the foundation, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the master of the family, spoke the blessing in the circle of his disciples. "He took the

bread," the text informs us, "and brake it." "He took likewise the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it unto them." But he imparted to his thanksgiving a higher and heavenly reference to the eternal goods and blessings of the new covenant, founded by himself, and when, as he handed the bread and wine to his disciples, he said solemnly: "Take, eat, this is my body! Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins,"—he alluded to the reconciliation of sinful men with God, effected by his death, and sealed upon the cross, to the freedom from guilt and the punishment for sin won by him, to deliverance from the bondage of sin, wherein consists the true freedom of the children of God, and to the entrance into the heavenly Canaan, the country of all pious believers. For these are the blessings of the new covenant, which is a covenant of grace, of happiness, of peace, of salvation, wherefore St Paul describes the essence of the kingdom of God founded by Jesus Christ, as "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Bread and wine, therefore, in the holy supper, were to represent to his followers, and all believers of every age, His body and His blood,—His body which he was giving up to death as an offering for the sins of the world, in order to our salvation, and the founding of a new covenant of grace—His blood which he was about to shed upon the cross for the forgiveness of sins. But bread and wine were intended by no means to be only signs of remembrance, but also pledges of his constant and hallowing presence among them, and seals of their uninterrupted communion with Him; and as they in this sacred feast did receive the bodily nourishment which belongs to the senses, so were they altogether to receive into themselves Him, who was invisibly present in the power of the Godhead, to the nourishment, enlivening and strengthening of their inward man, and in this union with Him his divine life-giving power would interpenetrate their whole being, would hallow and purify it; in this union with Him they were to receive the happy certainty of eternal life together with

him, and have a pledge of their future resurrection and partaking of the glories of the world to come. Ignatius, therefore, called the Holy Supper, "A medicine of immortality, an antidote to death, a pledge of a life that passeth not away in Christ Jesus."

Thus, then, did the Christians of the first centuries regard the sacrament of the altar as a feast of remembrance, which they were to celebrate according to the ordinance of the Lord himself, as a memorial of his sufferings and death, and the glorious blessings of his offering on the cross; as the feast of a covenant, in which the glorified but invisibly present Redeemer imparted himself to them in the fulness of his grace, and received them into the communion of his exalted life; and also as a feast of love to give life to the inward communion, in which they were joined one with another, as members of one spiritual body, under one head. And this meal they celebrated with holy joy, in the pious hope that they should one day attain from faith to a blessed sight, and in their heavenly country should enjoy the goods and blessings won for them by Christ's sufferings and death, and by his mercy become partakers of His glory in his invisible kingdom.

II. Let us now examine, my brethren, how the first Christians celebrated this holy feast, and we shall before all perceive that it was originally combined with a social meal. These two together were called the feast of the Lord, the feast of love, and by them it was their intention to signify the union of the faithful with their Lord, and their brotherly alliance one with another. We find both in the first Christian church at Jerusalem, of which the book of the Acts of the Apostles relates, "They remained steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayer." We find both united in the first church at Corinth. In these so-called *Agapæ* or love-feasts, which we have before spoken of, all difference of earthly ranks and situations between those bound together in one body, with Christ for their head, were intended to disappear. All were

to be here in the Lord, rich and poor, high and low, masters and servants, were all to eat one with another, at one table. In the meanwhile, abuses and disorders of all kinds crept in, such as Paul attacks so severely in the church of Corinth ; and the more the church extended itself, and the pure Christian mind departed, the more frequently did such disorders arise, which were naturally calculated to give the heathen many opportunities of treating the Christians contemptuously, and setting them in a hateful light. It must not, therefore, appear strange to us to see the love-feasts gradually separated from the Lord's Supper, and finally altogether omitted. Among us, this holy supper ought to be always a feast of love, my brethren, and we should never forget that here, at the altar of our crucified Redeemer, all worldly distinctions of rank, station, birth, and wealth, ought entirely to cease ; that here we ought to hear nothing of high and low, of rich and poor, of servant and master ; that we are here all equal in the sight of God. Let each one, therefore, advance to the celebration of this holy sacrament with a heart full of humility and love, and remember the declaration of the apostle, " We are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

The early Christians considered the blessing and prayer as an essential part of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, by which the bread and wine were consecrated, and from which the holy feast itself received the name of Eucharist, or giving of thanks. While the Head of the Church lifted up the bread and wine, he thanked God in the name of the whole church, who joined with him in a loud Amen, as well for the gifts of nature, as for the blessings of his grace in Christ Jesus. Both of these things are indeed intimately connected together, for it is only the redeemed man who has again returned to childlike relationship with the heavenly Father, that knows rightly how that it is the love of God that gives him all things ; all earthly gifts obtain for *him* a higher meaning ; they are to him pledges of those heavenly goods, which the love of the

Father hath prepared for us in his Son, Jesus Christ. And the holy eucharist was the communication of those heavenly goods. With the bread and wine hallowed by the blessing, whereby the bodily life is nourished, strengthened, and supported, is united by the almighty power of God, who causes these earthly means of nourishment to grow for man's use, a higher heavenly nourishment for the life of the inward man. Christ himself enters into them that are His, and takes up his abode with them, he who calls himself the bread of life, and the water that springs up unto everlasting life. Forget not this, when thou celebratest this holy sacrament. Thy bodily eyes indeed behold nothing save meat and drink for the body, but to the eyes of thy faith the glorified Redeemer will be present, and will communicate himself to thy believing spirit, that thou mayest be refreshed and saved by His grace and His peace, sanctified by His spirit, and strengthened and supported in His fellowship unto eternal life. Look therefore well to it, that thou celebrate this holy feast with believing heart, and think always on the earnest warning of the apostle, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh his own damnation, not considering the Lord's body."

For the rest, the members of the community themselves brought the bread and wine as free gifts, which were considered the spiritual thank-offerings of Christians, and whilst the head of the community consecrated them with blessing, he represented the whole church as a priestly nation, ready to hallow every thing which God had bestowed on them again to his service. These spiritual thank-offerings of Christians, which were nothing else than the free expression of their childlike love, were opposed to the sacrificial services of the Jews and heathens, and from them the whole celebration of the Lord's supper was called a sacrifice. With regard to this, Justin Martyr observes, "The prayers and thanksgivings which proceed from worthy men are the

only true sacrifices, well pleasing unto God ; *these alone* have Christians learned to make, especially at that holy feast, in which they call to remembrance the sufferings which Christ endured for their sakes." And Irenæus writes, " It is not sacrifice which sanctifies a man, but the conscience of the sacrificer sanctifies the sacrifice, if it be pure, and this causes God to receive it as from a friend." Thus the idea of the offering at this holy supper was only that of a spiritual thankoffering of Christians, which was symbolically to express the offering of Christ on the cross. Afterwards, however, the reference to this latter sacrifice became more prominently brought forward, and at last the error crept in, that the Lord's supper was itself a sacrifice which the priest offered,—that error of the sacrifice of the mass in the Romish church, which, contrary to the Scriptures, teaches us that the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is repeated in an unbloody manner in the mass, an idea that was never known to the primitive church of Christ, and which finds not the smallest support in the gospel, which, on the other hand, expressly teaches us " that Christ offered one sacrifice for sins," which needeth not to be repeated.

In the celebration of the holy supper the ordinary bread offered by the congregation was that generally used. Only a section of Judaizing Christians who solemnised it only once a year, at the feast of the passover, for a memorial of the last paschal feast of Christ, used for that purpose unleavened bread. The wine, too, was according to the manner of the East mixed with water, and many Christians loved to consider this mingling as a symbolic representation of the union of Christ with his church.

As long as the Christians met together daily, they daily celebrated the Lord's supper together with the Agapæ. But afterwards the celebration of the communion was reserved for an essential portion of each Sunday's worship, in which all the congregation, with the exception of the catechumens, took part. After the blessing, the deacons, according to their order, broke

bread, and gave wine to each of those present, and after the service was ended, set by part for the stranger, the sick or the captive, who had not been able to be present in the congregation, that they might have a share in the blessing given to the community, and abide in unbroken fellowship with them. In many churches, however, for example, in the North African, daily communion was considered needful ; for they considered it as the daily bond of union between the Lord and his church, as the daily means of strengthening, enlivening, and saving for Christians ; and accordingly Cyprian and Tertullian interpreted spiritually the petition for daily bread, as a petition for the uninterrupted, sanctifying union with the body of Christ by His holy supper. They took therefore a part of the consecrated bread home to their houses, which, in case of necessity, was to take the place of the whole communion ; and in this habit, which arose through error and abuse, we have the first traces of the communion under one form. Thus did every man partake of the communion in his own house after morning prayer, before he proceeded to his earthly occupations, in order by his fellowship with his Lord to sanctify the life of the whole day following. Little as we can approve of this custom, my brethren, we can yet reverence in it the expression of the feelings, and the great consciousness of those Christians who felt so vividly the need of daily renewing their communion with Christ ; and in this respect their conduct puts to shame many Christians of this day, who scarcely think of sealing their communion with their Redeemer in the holy eucharist once in the year. Other Christians, on the other hand, were of opinion, that men ought only to receive this holy meal after a separate and especial examination of their hearts, and preparation of their souls, and therefore only at certain seasons, regulated by the necessities of the individuals ; and this, without a doubt, is the most proper view, which, accordingly, our evangelical church clings fast to, and therefore prescribes to no one when and how often he is to receive the sacrament, but leaves this

to the conscience of the individual ; and we have only to lament the indifference and lukewarmness of so many Christians, in whom there never seems to arise any deep desire or necessity of the heart for the holy communion, nay, who do not feel roused to partake of it, when their children, for the first time after their renewal of their baptismal covenant, are permitted to become recipients of this holy ordinance.

In the same North African church, they were accustomed to administer to children the holy supper, supposing that this sacrament was of equal necessity to their salvation with that of baptism. And thus arose a practice of giving to children, who could not as yet eat bread, only the wine to drink,—another example how a superstitious abuse, quite opposed to the divine ordinance, led to the separation and division of the elements in the sacred supper. Our evangelical church, on the other hand, in her celebration of the sacrament, keeps entirely and alone to the ordinance and words of our Lord, who has expressly commanded, “ Take, eat ; take and drink ye all of this.” Thus has the Lord commanded, and every departure from this form we must declare at once to be wilful injury to its nature, and a sinful and inexcusable mutilation of the sacrament.

Lastly, we have to mention, how the holy supper came originally to be the religious consecration of all the relations of life. The Christians undertook nothing of importance without this solemnity, and in this respect their example ought especially to excite us. Persons newly married partook of it at the close of their wedding, and they were remembered and interceded for and blessed in the prayer preceding the communion. How has this beautiful custom been lost among us, my brethren, and how many marriages are contracted without thinking on the Lord, and, before all things, renewing the covenant with him in the holy supper ! Ye who are betrothed, if there be any in this congregation, remember the example of the first Christians, and ground your connection on the covenant of your hearts with the Lord ! For in this case only can it be to you a

source of blessing and of joy. Thus, too, was the sacred supper connected with the feast of remembrance of the dead, for a seal of the uninterrupted communion in which they were convinced that they stood with the departed faithful. On the anniversary of their deaths, their relations solemnized the holy supper, and in the name of those who were perfected, as though they were still living members of the church, offered gifts at the altar, and a prayer for the peace of the souls of the dead was taken into the church's prayers. In like manner whole churches celebrated the holy communion on the anniversary of the death of their martyrs, which they deemed the day of their birth unto a higher in the invisible kingdom of God; and there was doubtlessly something very touching and exciting, in thus making present to men the alliance of the church militant and triumphant, the heavenly and earthly community. But men very soon fell into the erroneous notion, that the communion celebrated by the living could also be of profit to the dead, and the idea of the Lord's supper as a sacrifice contributed not a little to strengthen this fancy. In this we can already see the bud of the afterwards so ruinous masses for souls, with which such great abuses have been connected in the Romish church, and it cannot but grieve us sorely, that the corruption of the human heart has so distorted and desecrated the purest and holiest ordinances of the Lord. The primitive church indeed kept itself clear of such erroneous notions, but the bud of them lay already in its bosom, and was rapidly developed with the course of time, and begot that great corruption in the latter church, which caused the conflict of the reformers in the sixteenth century, to which our evangelical church owes its existence. God be praised that we belong to that church, and walk in the pure light of the gospel! O, let us look to it, that we may be honest and worthy members of that church! "Let us hold fast that which we have, that no man take our crown from us." Let us be free from serving men, remain faithful in the confession of the Lord and his truth, and renew our de-

termination of making use of the means of grace offered us in his church, in simplicity and fidelity, according to his will, and conformably with his ordinance, that we may grow in all things to Him who is the head. Bless us thereunto, O Lord Jesus Christ, and hear our united prayer when we pray to thee :

“ In this last and troubled hour,
Grant us firmness, Lord, and power,
That we thy sacrament and word may keep
Secure and firm until in death we sleep !”

Amen.

SERMON XVII.

OF THE NATURE OF PENANCE IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

SEARCH us, O God, and know our hearts ; try us and know our thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting ! Amen.

Before we close our considerations on the ecclesiastical life of the early Christians, my brethren, we have yet to consider a very important point which bears on this subject, namely, the church discipline, or the nature of penance in the earliest times of the church. If the church, as she appears as the external institution for the education and training of men for the invisible world, is fully to attain its holy purposes, it seems evident that it must have the right to restrain or withhold, by severe measures, those who will not remain subject to her regulations, or else to exclude them entirely from her body, if they obstinately persist in their resistance ; and although they bear the name of Christians, yet, inasmuch as they have proved themselves unworthy of that appellation by their tone of feeling and life, to consider them as heathens, as men standing in no real communion with them, so long as they remain impenitent. This conduct our Lord himself seems to authorize, when he makes this declaration, “ If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone ; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church ; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be

unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." But as other declarations of our Lord seem to lead to the conclusion, that such a sifting and exclusion of unworthy members of the church is against his will, it becomes difficult to decide what is here the right view, and it remains matter of doubt, whether the exercise of such ecclesiastical discipline is in a general way to be justified or advised.

Let us now look, my brethren, to other institutions which have for their end the advancement of the kingdom of God, and we cannot deny that they have not only the right, but are also bound to exercise a wholesome discipline for the attainment of their purpose. Thus, first of all, is the house, the family. Or should not the head of it, the father of the family, consider himself bound to maintain order and regularity among his dependents, and can he not apply appropriate means, in order to compel the disobedient to a fulfilment of their duty? Just so, to proceed, the school. Must not youth be led on by love and strictness to industry, order, and modesty; and does not a proper school discipline naturally come in here? And as regards the state, must we not grant it permission, even by the application of the most harsh measures of discipline, to rein in and bring back to their duty those persons who oppose its regulations and laws, and disturb and overturn the peace and happiness of the civil society? Nay, would not an unseasonable regard to unworthy and mischievous members of the civil community be severity and cruelty towards the good, quiet, peaceable, and honest citizens; and do we not see what discipline the state does really exercise through its courts of justice, police establishments and prisons, in order to punish criminals and evil men, and wherever it is possible to amend them?

If, then, this be so, my brethren, is the church alone to endure its calamity, if unworthy members, whom she nourishes in her bosom, disturb her peace, injure her plans, and exercise a prejudicial and dangerous influence? Is she not to have the right of applying severe measures to such men, and exercising a strict disci-

pline, in order either to bring them to a change of disposition, or to guard against crime and seduction of others, or to repress and restrain the rude outbreaks of the wicked, or to work powerfully against the prejudicial and dangerous influence of bad examples? The decision of this question is very difficult, my brethren, and there is much to say for and against it. At the same time, it is a subject so important, that it merits that we should give it our utmost attention. Let us, then, direct our minds to it, and in our investigation let us take into our view the conduct of the church in the first centuries. That perhaps may contribute to render easier the decision of this question. But, first, let us implore God for his blessing on our task.

TEXT. Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.—Ephesians, v. 25-27.

The church, then, which the Lord has bought with his own blood, is not to have “spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.” The members of it are to be pure, holy, and without blemish; are to be like Christ, their divine master, in mind and walk. As many of them, then, as really are inspired by his Spirit, and without resting, seek after sanctification in faith on him, form what we are wont to call the communion of saints, or the invisible church. But we must also contemplate the church as it appears on earth, and in as far as its members, forming an external union, compose the so-called visible church. To this visible church belong all who are baptized in the name of Jesus, without reference to their disposition, conduct, worthiness, or unworthiness. The visible church is a mixture of good and evil, but her duty is, and remains, to train her members for the invisible church, and thus for worthy members of the kingdom of God; and here arises the ques-

tion, whether the office of punishment belongs to her, in order to attain to her great and holy purpose, whether she is entitled and bound to make use of ecclesiastical discipline? And to this highly important point we will now turn our attention, while we especially pay regard to the deportment of the early Christian church on this matter, and we will try to answer the four following questions :

1. What can be proved from the gospel, and the example of the primitive church as regards an ecclesiastical discipline?
2. What purpose can and should this have?
3. To what errors may it lead?
4. What is the state of the case now among us?

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth ; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. That the Lord himself, with undoubted certainty, knew from the beginning how that in his kingdom, in as far as it stood forth externally in the world, there would always be a mixture of good and evil, even to the end of time, is clearly shewn by many of his most express declarations. But, at the same time, he always added, that he would keep for himself the office of judge, and that of sifting the genuine and false members of his kingdom, as well as the final decision of their fate. As in the well known similitude of the tares among the wheat, the servants in the first burst of zeal wished to go and violently pluck out the tares, but the master of the field stops them, by the consideration that they might easily root out the wheat with them; and that, therefore, he willed that both should grow together until the harvest, and then the separation should take place. Besides this, there is a possibility in the church of the Lord, that many tares may yet be changed into good fruit; that Christians merely in name and appearance may yet, under the discipline of the Holy Spirit, be formed into members of the invisible church. The Redeemer, therefore, willed the con-

tinuation of the mixture of good and evil. On this head he explains himself in another parable, where he says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind. Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just; and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." This His doctrine he sealed by his example, for he included Judas in the number of his disciples; and although he knew that in his heart he was not of their number, yet he kept him unto the end, and bore with him with divine patience, ever striving by his teaching and warnings to exercise a better influence over him.

Besides this, no man is able to pronounce a certainly just judgment, and to undertake with security to make a separation between genuine and false members of the church. "Judge nothing before the time," is accordingly the warning of the apostle, "until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart." How many a sinner is veiled under the appearance of godliness, and knows how, by his hypocrisy, to deceive the eyes of men? How many a Christian humbly calls Jesus his Lord, without feeling, at the same time, in the least moved by his spirit? Yes! The Lord declares it himself, "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many marvellous works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Thus will many be considered by men as pious, and faithful, and holy, who will appear despicable before the Searcher of hearts; and many will be converted like that publican, despised and rejected, and thrust away without love by pharisaically minded men, who by their inwardly lowly, hidden, and penitent mind have well pleased the Lord, and obtained the grace of justi-

cation. The Lord, indeed, says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit,"—and who will not heartily assent to this? But although it be true, that the really faithful and pious mind can never bring forth any thing but good fruit, and works pleasing unto God, yet, it is possible that, what shortsighted men consider as good fruit, may not always proceed from an internal and good root, and a pure disposition of the heart; and it is the disposition by which all human works will be valued and determined. The Lord beholds the heart, and uprightness is pleasing unto him. There is much that is evil, which does not exactly appear in rude outbreaks of internal vile lusts and desires, much that may have an outside show, which yet is not produced by the spirit of Jesus Christ, and which the omniscient and unerring judge in heaven will condemn, while men praise and extol it. Does not the Lord himself exclaim to the hypocritical Pharisees with severe earnestness, "The publicans and harlots shall go into the kingdom of heaven before you."

But yet we find, in the meanwhile, that the apostles, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in some cases, never hesitated regarding making a separation among the members of the newly founded church. Thus, St Peter gave over those first transgressors, Ananias and Sapphira, who "had lied to the Holy Ghost," to a fearful judgment, and the Lord confirmed his decision, by snatching away the hypocritical couple by a sudden death. Thus, also, St Paul severely reproaches the Corinthian Christians for not having expelled from their church an unworthy member who had committed incest, and commands them thus, "If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat;" with such an one ye shall have no communication. We cannot possibly think as

regards this conduct of the apostles, that, in so weighty a matter, they could have acted in contradiction to the will of the Lord; far rather must we believe, that if they did not in this matter follow express, but to us unknown, commands of Jesus Christ, yet they were illumined and guided by the Holy Spirit, who was to lead them into all truth, and reveal to them much which the Lord himself had not been able as yet to tell them. The primitive Christian church, then, acted according to the example of the apostles, in expelling from among them all such, as by rude outbursts of the evil that was in them, gave a proof of a heart as yet quite unregenerate, of a mind entirely without God, and without doubt they acted in this manner with perfect justice. For, as it is one of the natural rights of every society to exclude those from among them who are untrue to their principles, so also was this the incontrovertible right of every Christian community, and the church exercised it in every case that came before their notice. They could in this matter easily adopt regulations which existed in Judaism, for among them too offending members were degraded into different ranks. Such conduct, besides, appeared necessary, and that not only with regard to the church itself, but the neglect of it would have been unjustifiable as regarded the brethren. For the church had plainly these important duties, to keep herself as pure as possible within, to secure herself against the contagion of heathen corruption of morals, and to repress the idea that it was possible to be a Christian and yet to live in heathen service of sin. The church, therefore, from the beginning, cast out from their communion all those who had violated, by gross sins, the vow so solemnly made at their baptism, of renouncing the devil and all his works, and living a new life dedicated to God; and whose whole nature showed that they had either remained completely untouched by the spirit of Jesus Christ, or that they had again sunk back into the old service of sin. The church, on the other hand, wished to keep alive in all her members a consciousness that the Lord desired to gather together "a glorious

church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but holy and without blemish." They wished to make the excommunicated person feel, that, by reason of his sinful course of life, he could on no account become a partaker of the rights and goods which the Lord has promised only to his faithful and true disciples. She wished, too, and was obliged, by the severe discipline which she used, to convince the heathen how little they were justified in charging Christianity itself with the sins of a few individuals, who falsely entitled themselves Christians. Thus was Tertullian enabled to say to the heathen, " Those who are no Christians are unjustly called such. Such men take no part in our congregations ; they do not receive the communion with us, they are by their sins again become yours ; for we do not again have intercourse even with those whom your cruelty has forced to deny their faith ; and yet we would far more readily endure those among us who have fallen from the principles of our religion by compulsion, than those who have done so of their own free will. Moreover, you call those men Christians without reason, who are not acknowledged by us as Christians."

From all, then, that we have said, my brethren, it follows that, so far from the gospel being opposed to the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, it rather justifies and enjoins it. The apostle Paul declares the Christian churches not only to be justified, but also bound to eject out of their communion all who, by gross sins, had publicly shown themselves unworthy of the name of Christian brethren. Among such gross sins were reckoned not only those enumerated by the apostle Paul, such as theft, lasciviousness, adultery, drunkenness, and the like, but also, especially in times of persecution, denial of the Lord before the judgement-seats of the heathen, for thereby they expelled themselves from the church of Jesus Christ. The Christians were allowed to eat with all heathens, and to engage with them in intercourse of any kind, but with these fallen brethren they were bound to break off all society, and all brotherly communion was done away between them. " Them

that are without, God will judge," says St Paul. "Put away from yourselves that wicked person," said the same. And by these principles the Christian church of primitive times was guided.

II. But when we consider the end and aim of such ecclesiastical discipline, we shall find, that it was by no means opposed to the declarations and expressions of the Redeemer which we have before quoted. The visible church was designed to be an institution of instruction, it was to train and educate its members for the invisible kingdom of God. But though she deemed it necessary to exercise a severe discipline, yet was it by no means her intention to make a violent expulsion and rooting out of the unworthy, but this discipline was to be a means for the instruction, the improvement, and purification of its members. The purpose of it neither could nor was meant to be any other than to bring the excommunicated Christians to a sense of their guilt, and to lead them to repentance and sorrow for their errors and sins, and thus to improve them and win them back again. "God hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn again and live." Mindful of this truth the early Christian church exercised a severe discipline, not from a desire to punish, but with the intention of improving and converting, of awakening "that godly sorrow" in men's minds "that worketh a repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of." Wherever, therefore, an honest repentance and change of heart was manifested, the church was bound again to comfort, and again to receive into her communion, the excommunicated person. Thus does St Paul exhort the Corinthians, who had excommunicated the person stained with incest, to receive him again into communion, when he had exhibited unequivocal signs of repentance. "Sufficient unto this man is this punishment which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow. Wherefore, I beseech you, that you would

confirm your love toward him. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also." This principle was in general followed by the primitive church, and she settled, by different ordinances, the proofs of repentance and fidelity, which those who had fallen were to offer, and the duration of their exclusion from church communion and the Lord's supper, according to their different transgressions, and their spiritual stations. Of these *Pœnitentes*, as they were called, Tertullian writes, "That they should express their contrition by their whole appearance, and should pray with fasting to God for forgiveness of their sins, should publicly make confession of their sins before the church, and imploring all their Christian brethren to pray in their behalf, should especially throw themselves down before the presbyters, and the known friends of God." They had to go through four steps of penance in all. First of all, they had to stand at the church-door in robes of mourning; then they were allowed only to be present at the reading of the holy Scriptures, and the sermon; then they were permitted to be present at public prayer, but kneeling; and, lastly, they were permitted to attend the whole divine service and the communion. "The Christians," writes Origen, "bewail those who are carried away by lust or any other passion, as if they were dead, and after they have given long continued proofs that their souls are changed, they receive them again as catechumens, as though they had risen from the dead." If their repentance was considered sincere, and of sufficient duration, they were signed with the sign of blessing, the bishop and the clergy laid their hands on them, and they were again admitted into the church, and granted absolution. Thus did the church act like a tender mother, who indeed seems to withdraw her love from her disobedient and troublesome children, but only in order to rouse in them a feeling of sorrow for their ingratitude and obstinacy, and then again opens her arms to them, to embrace her children, and, full of love, to press them to her bosom, when they see their crime, and turn with repentance and tears, and pray to be received again and forgiven.

And yet all outward exercises of penance have in and for themselves no worth, my brethren, but only in as far as they are the actual expression of the inmost feelings, and the pure sensations of the heart. If these feelings are absent, this true penitence of the heart, there remains nothing but hypocrisy. Of this the teachers of the early church, who were inspired by the true spirit of the gospel, failed not to warn their hearers. They impressively referred Christians to the nature of inward Christian penitence, which only finds a suitable form of expression in these outward acts of penance. Thus, among others, Tertullian writes: "If a man condemns himself, God acquits him: believe me, so far as thou sparest not thyself God will spare thee." Is not this exactly what St Paul exhorts the Corinthians: "Judge yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged;" and what St John says, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?" Thus, too, did the pastors of the church of that time lay great stress on the difference between the absolution of the priests, and the forgiveness of sins by God, exactly as we always remind you, that the absolution which you receive from us in the penitential chair, only has its right signification and import, when you are fit recipients for forgiveness of sins, through the inward disposition of your hearts, which are known only to the omniscient God, and as we Sunday after Sunday, by virtue of our office, proclaim from the pulpit the grace of God, and the forgiveness of sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, "to all those who heartily repent of their sins, who believe sincerely in Jesus Christ, and have earnestly determined to lead a new and better life, by the aid of the Holy Spirit." Thus, Bishop Firmilianus of Cesarea in Cappadocia, writes, after the middle of the third century: "The bishops and presbyters meet every year among us, for the purpose of consulting together concerning matters of general interest, and to consider of the spiritual healing of our fallen brethren, through penitence, not as though they received from us the for-

givenness of sins, but that by us they may be led to a consciousness of their sins, and compelled to make a more perfect satisfaction to the Lord ;” and Cyprian of Carthage says: “ We do not anticipate the Lord’s judgment, so that he, if he find that the sinner has been truly and sincerely penitent, will confirm and ratify our decision. But if a man has deceived us with a hypocritical repentance, then let God, who is not mocked, and who looks into the heart of man, decide on that of which we are not competent to judge, and let the Lord improve the sentence of his servants.”

But however much stress the pastors of the church of that time laid on the purpose of church penance, on the import of the external practices, and the true nature of Christian penitence, that they might not be in danger of interchanging the internal and external to the peril of their souls, yet men from time to time forgot their exhortations and warnings, and, in progress of time, the most lamentable abuses in regard to ecclesiastical discipline and penance crept into the church. These errors are what we now wish to direct your attention to ; but as it is impossible that we should conclude our subject to-day, we will leave off here, and resume the thread of our discourse, if the Lord will, on the next occasion. May the Lord bless in our hearts what has been preached to us this day, and may He especially bring us all to the lively consciousness, that he has called us unto fellowship with his church, and by baptism consecrated us for a participation in his heavenly kingdom, “ that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy, and without blemish.” Remembering this dignity to which He has willed to exalt us, let us always implore Him to pour out his Spirit abundantly upon us, that we may walk worthily of the gospel that has been preached to us, in order by it to be daily more trained for that heavenly church, into which we one day hope to enter. And in this may He aid us of his abundant mercy ! Amen.

SERMON XVIII.

ON THE NATURE OF PENANCE IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

WE come to thee in sorrow, and heavy laden, O Lord, our God ! We confess to thee our sins with hearty repentance, and pray thee to forgive them, for Jesus Christ's sake, and receive us again into the fellowship of thy grace ! Cast us not away from thy presence, and deal not with us after our iniquities ! It is our earnest determination to serve thee henceforward more faithfully. O bless us, and lend us the aid of thy Holy Spirit, that we may never swerve from thee ! Turn us again, and we shall be turned, O Lord, for thou art our God ! Amen.

In concluding the considerations, which we on the last occasion commenced, regarding the nature of penance in the primitive Christian church, we shall finish all that we have to offer you concerning the ecclesiastical life of Christians during the three first centuries, and shall then proceed to turn our attention to their lives as citizens and members of a family. But as to what regards the nature of penance, we have lately reminded you of the church discipline which was practised in the first Christian churches, and in relation to this circumstance, have proposed to answer four questions, of which, owing to the shortness of the time, we were enabled to consider only two at any length. We especially and particularly investigated what was to be obtained from the gospel itself, and the example of the primitive church for or against the necessity and expediency of church discipline ; and we must have been all

convinced that both the declarations of our Lord, and the example of the apostles and early Christians, pronounce in favour of it. We then proceeded to answer our second question, what purpose such an ecclesiastical discipline as the early Christians used, could and should have, and found that this purpose was no other than to bring those who, in consequence of denial of their faith, or their sinful lives, had been excommunicated from the church, to a knowledge of their sins, a consciousness of their guilt, repentance and penance for their falling away, and humble conversion from their errors, so that there should be no hesitation in receiving them back to church communion, when they had given sufficient proof of true repentance and real change of heart.

By this conduct the church was completely fulfilling her intention, that of being an institution to train up men for the kingdom of God. In as far, indeed, as it is an external manifestation, an external union of men, who have been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and acknowledge his gospel, it must always be a mixture of believers and unbelievers, of good and evil, of genuine and false Christians. But the real kingdom of God can impossibly consist of such a mixture of worthy and unworthy members, it must rather be a holy church, into which nothing unclean and sinful can enter, but of which all the members follow the Lord in heart and life, and are all governed and led by his spirit. True Christians manifest themselves always by incessantly and earnestly striving after holiness. Now the external and visible church should and will form all her members into such true and genuine Christians, by a faithful and conscientious administration and application of the means of grace given her by the Lord. But as it is in the nature of all instruction to exercise a wholesome degree of severity, when it becomes necessary, against such as contend against her purposes, so likewise must the church, in as far as it is an institution of instruction, have the right and the power to exercise a strict discipline, where there is need, provided that it never lose sight of the principle, that her only

purpose in this discipline must be the improvement of erring sinners.

But, undoubtedly, we cannot deny the possibility of misconceptions on this subject, my brethren. How easily may this system of penance be converted into a mere external form? How easily may all that is essential in it be overlooked, and the unessential overvalued? Errors and abuses may arise, and they have arisen. This the history of the Christian church amply testifies. Nay, more, the germs of these errors are to be found even in the earliest times of the church, and later ages give us a fearful proof, and a wholesome warning, what prejudicial and dangerous results have ensued from it. It shall be our business to-day to examine into these errors, and afterwards to investigate as to the conduct of our church with regard to this discipline, and with this we will conclude our considerations concerning the ecclesiastical life of the first Christians; and may the Lord bless us in this our task. Amen.

TEXT. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.—1 John, i. 9.

Even regenerate Christians, my brethren, dare not consider themselves to be completely without sin. St Paul was, without doubt, a regenerate Christian,—and yet we hear from his own mouth the lowly confession, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” Therefore, St John declares immediately before our text, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” “So long as man bears flesh about with him,” writes the father of the church, Augustine, “he has always sins, though it may be light ones. But beware of despising those that we call light. If thou despisest them, when thou weighest them, be terrified when thou countest them. Many light things make a heavy one; many drops make a river.” But if we confess our sins,—and this confession includes hearty repentance and penance, as well

as a longing for forgiveness and grace,—God is “faithful,” He always holds fast to what he has promised, that he will forgive sins; and at the same time he is “just,” whereby his faithfulness is still more accurately described as one entirely untainted, unspotted, and pure. The faithful and holy God will make all his word to us sure. He forgives us our sins, drives us not away from the fellowship of his grace, and purifies us, that is, takes the guilt of every trespass away from our consciences, that we may come into his presence, as his children, with joy; and that, as the apostle reminds us, for the sake of the blood of Jesus Christ. If the church hold fast to this apostolic declaration, she will be preserved from all errors as regards penance and church discipline. But where this truth is forgotten, the most grievous abuses may creep into the church, as, in fact, with the course of time, has been the case. Let us, therefore, in conformity with the words of our text, and the course of our considerations concerning the ecclesiastical discipline of the first ages of the church, go on to answer the remaining two questions, which we had yet to consider, for the conclusion of this subject, by investigating,

3. What errors are possible, and are to be avoided, with reference to the exercise of this church discipline? and,

4. How church discipline is conducted among ourselves?

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

III. The first error into which men stood in danger of falling through the church institution of penance, and into which it actually did fall, was the interchange of the internal and external, of the invisible and visible church, and the over value attached to communion with the latter, whereby men completely lost out of sight the peculiar and highest purpose of church discipline. We have indeed seen how very earnest the teachers of the first centuries were in holding fast to the right point of

view, and calling the attention of Christians especially to this, that all salvation depended not on this external union with the church, but far more upon true fellowship of faith and life with the Redeemer, and that every thing hinged upon this alone, namely, membership of the invisible church of God. According to this view, which has its sure foundation in the gospel itself, it is only exclusion from the invisible church which can prejudice the eternal salvation of man, and this can neither be made nor removed by any external force. In this nothing decides, but the mind and life of the individual, so that a man may easily belong to the external church, and yet be excluded from the kingdom of God, as also a man may be converted and become a blessed partaker in the kingdom of God, even if those who hold the government of the church, and who are subject to error, cut him off from communion with the visible church. Thus there were innumerable instances of men, who, in the later centuries, were regarded as heretics, and condemned as such by the Romish church, of whom I will only adduce a Huss and a Luther, who yet were doubtless genuine members of the kingdom of God, notwithstanding the excommunication which they suffered. There is but *one* way by which a man can obtain communion with the invisible church, attain to a participation in the blessings of God's kingdom, and find grace and forgiveness, and that way is repentance in faith. As want of faith, want of penitence, and obstinate love of sin, shut us out from God, and a participation in the riches of his salvation, so also do we by repentance and faith appropriate to ourselves all that Christ has merited and earned for us. He who in this way seeks to be united with his Redeemer, really belongs to Him, and is a blessed participator in that kingdom, whether he be received or not into any visible church. This is what St John intends, when he assures us in our text, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Every thing, therefore, depends on the internal repentance of the heart, and nothing external has any

value, except in as far as it is the fruit and expression of this internal repentance. On the other hand, a man may confess his sins with his lips, publicly humble himself, and subject himself to all kinds of exercises of penance, without thereby pleasing God, that is, if the decisive internal sense of sin is wanting, if his external acts proceed not out of an upright heart, if it is nothing but show, falsehood, and hypocrisy, which no one has the power to decide, save He that cannot be deceived,—the searcher of hearts. And how easy is it for men to confound the confession of sins before the church, which the *pœnitentes* had to make, and which is no sure and incontrovertible sign of true repentance, with the internal confession of sins to God; how easy to confound humiliation before men with humiliation of the heart before God, without which there is no true repentance: how easy to forget, in the exercises of penance ordained by the external church, and which may all be hypocritical, that true and hearty repentance which is the indispensable condition of forgiveness of sins, and reception again into the fellowship of God? And unhappily this was the case, my brethren. In progress of time men began to overvalue communion with the visible church, and to regard it as all that was essential, and real repentance was forced to retire into the back ground as an unessential thing.

A second error, not less dangerous than the first, was the manner in which the power of the priesthood was overrated. This false idea arose from the notion of a priesthood of the New Testament answering to that of the Old. Men separated in a most unevangelical manner, the priesthood from the laity, as being a peculiarly holy and exalted station, and forgot that, according to the gospel, all Christians are a priestly nation. They therefore attributed a peculiar importance to the priestly absolution or declaration of forgiveness of sins, and confused it with that forgiveness which God alone can grant. Was it then strange, if the claims of the clergy continually rose higher, and if they took their stand haughtily on the power which they exercised of loos-

ing and binding ! By this overvaluing of the so-called power of the keys, that is, the power of opening and shutting the kingdom of heaven, of retaining and forgiving sins, was laid, even in the first centuries, the foundation of that incredible tyranny, which, in later years, the Popes of Rome exercised over church and state, when every thing trembled at their ban, and when exclusion from church communion was accompanied by exclusion from the greatest advantages of social life, and by persecutions of every kind. In justification of this practice they appealed to the full powers given to Peter, when the Lord said to him, " I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." But neither was this power confined to the person of Peter, nor given to him alone, but rather to all the apostles, as is proved incontrovertibly from the gospel, and from the apostles it has proceeded to all the faithful. It is none other than the power of the church to announce to believers forgiveness of sins and reception into the kingdom of heaven, but to unbelievers, as long as they continue in unbelief, condemnation and exclusion from that kingdom, for to the one the gospel by its very nature can be only " a savour of life unto life," to the other it must be " a savour of death unto death." In this sense, do we, ministers of the word in our evangelical church, still exercise this power in the name of the church, and every real Christian who preaches the pure gospel can exercise it. On the other hand, the Romish church teaches that the priesthood have a judicial power, to remit and to retain sins; that they not only as ministers of the church proclaim forgiveness of sins in the name of God, but really forgive sins, and therefore also by denying absolution can condemn and shut out of the kingdom of heaven, of which power the gospel knows and teaches nothing.

Had men held firmly to, and explained the distinction between the visible and invisible church, that the priestly power was confined to the announcement of

the forgiveness of sins given by Christ Jesus, under the condition of faith and repentance, but was by no means a judicial power, to condemn or acquit, because a power such as this can belong alone to the infallible searcher of hearts,—then a third error would have been avoided, into which men fell in the treatment of those who had fallen. The more severe and the milder view of the institution of penance caused grievous contentions between the churches of Rome and Carthage. In both there arose a gentler party, who by degrees became the ruling one. Their principle was, that the church must receive all who had fallen, whatever were their sins, and give them all hope of forgiveness of sin under the condition of genuine repentance, and give them, at least in the hour of death, if they exhibited true repentance, absolution, and the communion. But from attributing an excessive importance to external church communion, they sought to obtain this *alone* by all contrivances. For this end those who had fallen, requested the all-powerful intercession of the witnesses to the faith, who amid all tortures on account of their profession of Christ, had yet been found faithful. Many of these men split upon the rock of spiritual pride, for they were treated with over much veneration. Flattered by the consideration with which they were treated, they frequently magisterially demanded the immediate restoration of those who had fallen to church communion, without regard to their feelings of repentance; and one of them in the church of Carthage issued what were called certificates of church communion (*libelli pacis*), on the strength of which absolution was immediately to be granted to those who had fallen away. Such an abuse was of course calculated to overthrow all discipline and order, and therefore Cyprian resolutely opposed it, and thus declares his sentiments with peculiar earnestness: “Let no man deceive himself! The Lord alone can have mercy upon men; *He* alone can grant pardon to sins committed against Himself, who bore our sins, who suffered for us, whom God has given for our sins. The servant cannot for-

give the sins committed against his master. We must pray to the Lord, who proclaims that he will deny all who deny Him, and to whom the Father hath committed all judgment. If the martyrs desire any thing, the fulfilment must depend upon the rectitude of that which they desire." And yet Cyprian himself was not consistent in his own conduct. He yielded so far as to grant absolution to those fallen brethren, who in mortal illness desired the communion, and supported their claim to it by one of the certificates of the martyrs. It was right that he did not wish to refuse the dying the last consolation, but it was wrong that he gave any weight to these certificates, for thereby he only fostered that false confidence in men, without gaining any thing by such a compliance.

But, besides this moderate party, there arose also an over severe faction, who would not permit, under any consideration, the restitution of fallen brethren to church communion, and this caused violent contentions, especially in Rome. This party supposed that the forgiveness assured by the gospel referred only to sins committed before baptism, but that with reference to later sins (always remembering that this did not regard sins of infirmity, but only mortal sins, among which were reckoned denial of the Lord in times of persecution), no declaration of God's counsel had been revealed, and therefore the church had no right to grant absolution to the fallen. They maintained that those who had fallen ought not to be neglected, but that the church could do no more for them than exhort them to repentance, and recommend them to divine mercy. Rightly might Cyprian exclaim, "Oh what a mockery! To say to thy poor brother, 'Mourn and pour forth tears, sigh day and night, do abundant good, to obtain grace, but after all this thou must die without church communion!' To exhort him to repentance, and yet to deny him consolation and cure! Behold, there lies thy brother grievously wounded in battle by the adversary! On one side Satan is striving to kill him whom he has wounded, on the other side Christ exhorts us not to suffer *him* to be

completely destroyed for whom He died. On whose side shall we stand? Shall we advance the work of Satan, shall we pass by our brother lying half dead, as did the priest and Levite in the gospel? Or shall we not rather, as priests of Jesus Christ, and of God, after his example, snatch the wounded from the jaws of the adversary, and after we have done all we can to heal him, leave the final decision of his fate to God?" This more severe party also declared, again confusing the invisible and the visible church, that it was an essential characteristic of the true church to be pure and holy. That every church which suffered gross sinners to remain in her, ceased to be a true church. The maintainers of this view called themselves accordingly "the pure (*οἱ καθαροί*)." Such men were rightly reminded by Cyprian: "Although there are tares to be found in the church, yet this must not disturb our faith and our charity, so that we on that account should be induced to tear ourselves away from the church. We must labour to belong to the wheat, in order that when the wheat is gathered into the garner of the Lord, we may receive the reward of our labours. The apostle says, 'In a great house, there are not only vessels of silver and gold, but vessels of wood and clay, and some to dishonour, some also to honour.' Let us, therefore, labour, as far as we are able, to be those golden or silver vessels. But to dash in pieces the earthen vessels is given to the Lord alone, to whom also the rod of iron has been committed. The servant cannot be greater than his master, and none may take that to himself which the Father hath committed to the Son alone, namely, to believe himself capable of bearing the winnowing-fan, to cleanse and purify the threshing-floor, or to think that he can by his human judgment separate the tares from the wheat."

This severe party formed till the later ages of the church a separate sect, when the church came forth victorious out of the conflict. But there have never been wanting Christians who have defended these views of the true church, and we know them under the title of

“Separatists.” These men have always contributed to point out to the church of the Lord her peculiar office, and thus far have they been a blessing to it. But they have been wanting in the humility which is ready to acknowledge the imperfection of our present position, and to bear with the weak in love and patience; and therefore have these men, who believe themselves exalted over all, seldom withstood the temptation to spiritual pride, and have but rarely continued “the pure ones,” which perhaps they really were at the beginning. Let us therefore always think on our own weakness, and labour in love and patience for the improvement of our brethren, and not “judge before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man have praise of God.”

If, then, we consider of a Christian system of discipline, my brethren,—and that there should be one is the conclusion we draw from what we have said,—this must not be exercised by individual clergymen, but by the church through representatives chosen by itself acting with the clergy, and the distinction between internal and external must be carefully preserved. The church never judges the inward condition of man, for this belongs, and is known only to the Searcher of hearts, but she has certainly the right, and is bound to exercise it, to give judgment concerning the outward deportment of her members. She must besides confine herself to teaching, warning, exhorting, and such kinds of discipline, which pave the way to a reunion with the church, and are calculated to promote it; she must not deny access to the preaching of the word, nor allow her punishments to have any influence on the worldly or civil interests of the offenders. Church discipline, therefore, can only consist in exclusion from sacramental communion with the congregation, and this to continue only as long as the impenitent mind remains, and and there is no desire manifested to return to the communion of the church. “That church,” says a respect-

ed pastor of our times, “ which never allows an evil course of life to exercise any influence on sacramental communion, which exercises no discipline at all, and neither will nor can do so, is not, although she may contain in her many living members of Christ, to be regarded in the light of a church, but only a congregation fortuitously collected for the preaching and reading of the word of God.”

IV. And who can and will deny, my brethren, that we ourselves are now in such a case ! Among us not a word is ever heard of church discipline ; and when we consider the mournful condition of the church in our days, we may well exclaim with the prophet, “ How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people ? How is she become as a widow ? She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary ? ” But, perhaps some one may ask, whether there is indeed reason among us to exercise, or even to desire, a church discipline ? Such persons we would refer to the reprobate lives of so many who call themselves Christians, and rather live as heathens. He who does not wilfully shut his eyes, must see how matters are proceeding in Christendom ; for “ the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.” Do, then, Christians who lead so reprobate a life belong to the kingdom of God ? Do they not sin grievously against the Christian fellowship, and can it be rightly allowed to a Christian church to suffer in the midst of her, and acknowledge as members, drunkards, adulterers, thieves, perjured, vicious and open sinners ? But some one may ask, are not such sinners punished by our Christian magistracy ? We grant that gross outbreaks of wickedness are subject to the punishment of Christian rulers,—but yet they are so only when they are such as to disturb civil order and tranquillity. Thieves are punished, but who punishes

drunkards, desecrators of the Sabbath, slanderers, blasphemers, adulterers? Is not open lasciviousness permitted? Are not taxes taken from those who encourage it, or who even themselves give up their bodies to disgrace? And who punishes those, who do not indeed live in gross sin, but yet who give the greatest offence by their lives; for there are many sinners, whose sins cannot be brought under the jurisdiction of the rulers. And yet the church must suffer them in her bosom, without having any pledge of their penitence, and cannot hinder their appearing as sponsors, coming to the altar, and professing in the holy sacrament a faith which in their lives they deny? Certainly, according to our rubric, all such must be warned from the holy sacrament, "as continue in their misdeeds, lead a sinful and impenitent life, and give offence and cause of stumbling to others;" and many are excluded by name from partaking of it, "all idolaters, blasphemers, despisers of God, and transgressors, all who belong to sects and heresies, who weaken the communion of the church, all perjured men, rebels against their parents and those in authority over them, all who seek to excite factions and civil disorders, all murderers, all given to anger, adulterers, whoremongers, thieves, robbers, covetous, drunkards, and lascivious men." But where is the church that can give a due impressiveness to such a dehortation, and effect such an exclusion, as long as they have no sufficient pledge of genuine repentance and change of heart?

Certainly the times have so altered, that one might think there was no more need of a church discipline practised in this manner, for even if unworthy members were excluded from becoming partakers in the sacramental profession of faith, it would be a matter quite indifferent to them. They have, indeed, for a long time excluded themselves, they have of their own accord excommunicated themselves, and would only laugh at and ridicule the man who forbade their attendance at the Lord's Supper as a punishment. This is connected with the indifference that prevails towards church, ser-

mon, the word of God, and his sacraments, and is a result of the deficient regulations of the church, of the entirely lost church discipline, and the laxity of the community themselves, who now never dream of asking whether a man is an honour to them or not by his life, who seem to have entirely lost the consciousness of their dignity, of their rights and duties as a Christian church. Thus, in fact, we no longer have a church among us, but only individual buildings, in which Christians fortuitously assemble for the hearing of the divine word, or for other church ordinances. That this a melancholy and mournful circumstance, no one can deny. But let us hope that it is a state that will pass away, and that, by God's help, it will become better! If all the signs of the times are not deceptive, we may confidently commit ourselves to this hope. The necessities by which we are surrounded, are experienced almost by all who have a genuine regard to the church and the spiritual health of her members. But the Lord will hear the aspirations, the sighs and prayers of his faithful disciples in His own good time, and of His mercy will grant unto His church what will be profitable for it. His counsels are, indeed, wonderful, but he brings everything to a glorious consummation. In the mean time let us but make the beginning ourselves, and strive earnestly to make matters better, to grow in knowledge of the truth, in faith, and a godly life, to show ourselves worthy and genuine members of the church, who find all their pleasure and delight in faithfully acknowledging the Lord with their lips and in their lives; and if individuals earnestly strive after this, we shall become better as a whole, and those churches will more and more arise of which the apostle says, "That Christ hath loved it, and given himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Amen.

SERMON XIX.

THE PUBLIC AND CIVIL LIFE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

THE grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all, now and for ever. Amen.

“ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God ; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God ; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Wilt thou, then, not be afraid of the power ? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same ; for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid ; for he beareth not the sword in vain ; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also ; for they are God’s ministers attending continually upon this very thing. Render, therefore, to all their dues ; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing but to love one another ; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.”

You will have perceived, my brethren, by this introduction, what end I propose to myself in this day’s discourse. As we have, up to this time, presented to ourselves the Christian and ecclesiastical life of the disciples of the Lord in the earliest centuries, we will now glance at their public and civil life, and try to become

acquainted with their relation to the state, and the words which we have just quoted from St Paul, place in our hands a standard by which to judge of this relation. They teach us to reverence in the authority which the higher powers have over us a power ordained by God, to which Christians are bound humbly and willingly to submit themselves, against which no one can or dare raise himself without sin, and with impunity, whose ordinances and laws ought to be respected, and held sacred by all, so long as nothing is contained in them which is at variance with the law of God himself. As St Paul requires in this case unconditional obedience as the sacred duty of subjects, so also does the apostle Peter demand the same, when he writes, "Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake ; whether it be to the king as supreme ; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well." And though Peter calls that an ordinance of man, which Paul calls an ordinance of God, yet the two apostles by no means contradict each other, for Paul refers especially to the source of all authority, and rightly deduces all power from God, by saying, "The powers that be are ordained of God." Peter, on the other hand, only alludes to the outward manifestation, and speaks of the relations and regulations which exist among men, and under this aspect he is right in calling the powers that be an ordinance of man, in as far as the relation between rulers and subjects is one that subsists upon earth among us men, according to God's will.

Inspired by the spirit of the gospel, the first Christians exhibited, in their relation to the state, the most conscientious obedience. They were the best and most faithful subjects, even there, where no human eye observed them ; even there, where others obeyed only from fear and compulsion. But the same spirit of the gospel which taught them out of love to God and to their neighbours, to submit themselves to all human ordinances, even when they were a grievous burden to them, that same spirit taught them to hearken to God more

than men, if an obedience opposed to God's law and ordinances were required of them, if their freedom of faith and conscience were about to be fettered. Then they joyfully sacrificed blood and property for the Lord's sake, and steadfastly endured every disgrace, every persecution, every torture, for they remembered the solemn declaration of Jesus Christ, "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." And this course must be always that pursued by Christians, my brethren. To the worldly power his rights,—to the Lord what is His,—must always be the watchword of Christians. How completely this was the case in the earliest times of the Christian church, we shall to-day recall to your memories. But first let us pray to God for his blessing.

TEXT. Render therefore unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God, the things which are God's.—St Matthew, xxii. 21.

This declaration of our Lord, my brethren, was the standard of the Christians of early times in all their deportment. With reference to this declaration, Justin Martyr thus addresses the heathen: "We strive more than others to pay to those who are ordained to that purpose by you our imposts and taxes, as we have been taught of the Lord, who has commanded us 'to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God, the things which are God's.' We therefore adore God alone, but we serve you cheerfully in all things else, while we recognize you as rulers of men." And Tertullian declares, that what the state lost by the extension of Christianity in temple revenues, would be soon counterbalanced by its gain in imposts and taxes, when they compared the conscientiousness and honesty of Christians with the usual subterfuges and deceits of the heathens. But to the words of our text, which the Christians used to have always in their mouths as their rule of daily life, he gave the following explanation: "The image of the emperor upon the coin must be given

to the emperor, but the image of God in man, must be given to God; wherefore thou must give thy money and goods, indeed, to the emperor, but thyself to God; for if all were Cæsar's, what would be left for God?" Let us now investigate more nearly the public and civil life of the early Christians, and consider,

1. The different judgments which they formed on this head; and,

2. Some examples of their manner of applying their principles.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. All Christians, my brethren, agreed in the principle expressed by our Lord in the text, but in the application of it to individual cases many difficulties arose, and these gave occasion to different views, as is the case, in fact, among us at this present time. The question was and is, how to be able to draw the boundary line between that which belongs to Cæsar, and that which is God's; between that which appertains only to outward things, and that which is incontestably a part of religion; and what things may be considered as indifferent in a Christian life, and what things not.

When Christianity entered into the heathen world, it met with many regulations, manners, and customs, which were so interwoven with the pagan religion, that they could scarcely be separated from each other. Were Christians, then, to regard such like usages as belonging only to social and civil life, and take part in them without any scruples of conscience; or were they at once to renounce them on account of their connection with paganism? Such questions were not always easy to decide.

Besides this, it was the intention of Christianity to remove from humanity every thing that was sinful and ungodly; and, on the other hand, to penetrate, to form and sanctify, all the pure relations and directions of the human heart with its hallowing spirit. "The kingdom

of heaven," the Lord himself has taught us, "is like a lump of leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened." But now the question arose, what is naturally ungodly, and what are those things which must be thoroughly driven out and extirpated by the new and living spirit of the gospel, as arising out of the corruption of our human nature; and what, on the other hand, is pure in man, and is fit to be taken up by Christianity, and to be glorified by its hallowing spirit? This is certainly a question hard to be decided, and in answering which a great variety of views must arise.

There must, certainly, have been many ordinances and customs which could not, without being completely changed, come under the influence of the gospel, being incapable of union with its pure spirit in the form in which they existed, but which, by degrees, were so moulded by the divine power of the gospel, that all repugnance between them must have disappeared, and they must have ceased to be opposed to the nature of Christianity. Were, then, these ancient habits to be forcibly disturbed; or, for the time, to be tolerated, until they were remoulded by the Christian spirit? The form does not produce the spirit, but the spirit produces the form, and does not begin to create a new state of things by means of violent external revolutions, but rather seeks to renew and modify old things, beginning at their very foundations. Christianity is a power before which all things must fall of themselves, whose forms are incompatible with its essence. But those things which are not in direct opposition to its spirit, but which are capable of being ennobled, are gradually purified and remoulded by its divine power until they are in unison with the essence of Christianity. And thus it was possible that many regulations, and many habits and customs of civil life, might, by degrees, take such a shape under the influence of the gospel, as to be no longer opposed to it.

On all these points the Christians of the first centuries entertained many different views. The one party

took up a severe system, by which they rejected every thing which bore the remotest relation to heathen superstition, or which seemed in any way to be a hinderance to the high earnestness of a life dedicated to God; they would rather, in this matter, go too far, than not far enough. The other party, on the contrary, attempted, wherever it was possible, to conform to the reigning habits and customs, without finding any thing sinful in them; and here it must have been very difficult to hit the right mean, and to err neither by too great laxity and remissness, nor by excessive severity and harshness. But, if we except those, who, like the apostle Paul, had comprehended the nature of true Christian liberty,—with this exception, the best Christians held to the stricter party. They would not give up the least portion of Christianity; it was their greatest treasure; it was to them the pearl of great price, and for which they were prepared to sacrifice all other things. The least approach to the manners and customs existing among the heathens appeared to them a denial of their faith. When, therefore, the other party appealed to the precept, that “they must give to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar’s;” that they must be subject to the existing ordinances and laws in all things relating to social or civil life, because that, by too great strictness, they would only unnecessarily throw a stumbling-block in the way of the heathen, and give them an opportunity of reviling religion; that, lastly, it was their duty “to become all things to all men, if by any means they might save some,” the stricter Christians answered, “even if we regard every thing external and earthly as belonging to the emperor, yet must our whole heart and life belong to God. That which is Cæsar’s must not come into opposition with that which is God’s. If it be a matter of such pressing necessity, that we give the heathen no opportunity to revile the name of Christian, we must completely give up our faith. They may continue to revile us, if we only give them no cause to do so by our unchristian acts, if they only revile what is Christian in us. We are bound, indeed, if rightly

understood, to become all things to all men, but not so as to become ourselves worldly through love to the worldly-minded, for the apostle Paul says also, ‘If I yet please men, I am not the servant of Christ.’”

If we are now to declare our judgment on the conduct of these Christians, we should not hesitate to pronounce, that both parties were right in the principles which they professed. The difficulty only consisted in deciding how these principles were rightly to be applied to individual cases. But, on this point, these Christians only agreed in a few instances; in others, on the contrary, they differed widely from each other. Let us point this out in relation to their public duties as citizens, and their public life as members of society.

II. In accordance with the rule given by the apostle, “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called,” it was unconditionally allowed to Christians to remain in their situation, to keep to their previous calling, and continue their previous trade, so long as this was not in itself immoral, or opposed to the generally acknowledged principles of Christianity. The Christian religion wished only to impart fresh honesty to them in their calling, their duty then became to act in it with a new feeling, as though it had been entrusted to them by God, and to employ themselves actively with an habitual regard to Him. On the other hand, whosoever, before his conversion to Christianity, had practised any trade either serving sin, or founded upon deceit, or in any way connected with heathen superstitions, was obliged to renounce it before baptism. He was then obliged to choose a new calling, and was aided for that purpose with especial kindness. According to this rule, no Christian could be employed in the manufacture of idols, in astrology, in pretended acts of magic, or stage-playing; and if any that had been baptized returned to such occupations, they were forthwith excluded from church communion. If they pretended that they could not gain a living by other means, they received the necessary support from the community.

But though in this matter the voice of early Christianity was unanimously against remaining in such callings, it was not so with the questions whether Christians might exercise the office of magistrates, or serve in the army. Since, as we have before seen, the heathen state religion was closely interwoven with all civil and social institutions, all such offices would easily introduce cases involving a temptation to join in heathen ceremonies. But on this point all agreed, that, in such cases no necessity could afford an excuse. "To be a Christian," says Tertullian, "is every where the same thing. One gospel and one Saviour, who will deny all that deny him, and confess all that confess him. With Him the faithful citizen is a soldier of the Lord, and the soldier has the same duties of faith as the citizen." The question meantime was, whether a Christian, without being unfaithful to his religion, could administer such offices of the state, a point allowed by one party, and contended against by the other. All professors of the gospel considered the essence of their religion to consist in following the Lord. As then the Lord walked upon earth in poverty and lowliness, and as his glory was veiled under the form of a servant, many thought that it was not right that a Christian, who should try to resemble his Lord in humility, self-denial, and renunciation of all earthly pomp and power, should receive public places of honour, and worldly dignities, and surround himself with external show; but that he should rather, after the example of Jesus, strip himself of all earthly power and majesty. Under this impression, Tertullian says: "As Christian thou art bound to follow the pattern of the Lord. He went about in humility and lowliness: he had not where to lay his head: he was not come to be ministered to, but to minister, and when he, though conscious of his kingdom, yet renounced his royal dignity, he thereby left his followers the most perfect pattern of renouncing all that is high and noble in the world's eyes, all earthly dignity and power. For who could have made more use of it than the Son of God? How many servants must have

ministered to him? What purple might have flowed down from his shoulders, what gold have glittered from his head, had it not been his principle that the glory of this world was alien to Him and His? What therefore he renounced, he also condemned."

We cannot help respecting, my brethren, so earnest and Christian a view, and yet we may not overlook the fact that it had its foundation in a confusion of the inward and outward. The true denial of all earthly things required by the gospel consists essentially in the renouncing of all love for the world and its vanities. But this can very well exist without excluding the external possession of earthly things, and without renouncing the use of earthly might and power in our temporal calling. All these things could and should be ennobled by a Christian spirit. But in the first warmth of conversion, Christians did not know this distinction between external and internal, and therefore many made it a point of peculiar importance that we should follow the Lord outwardly in the form of a servant, and renounce and condemn all earthly grandeur and power. They had no idea that Christianity would appropriate to itself the institutions of the state, and penetrate them by its hallowing spirit. They stood rather as a priestly spiritual race in opposition to the state, and the gospel appeared to them to influence public life only by spreading a more pure and holy mind among the citizens of the state, which most certainly was its intention. When, therefore, Celsus demanded of the Christians that they should undertake magisterial offices in their country, Origen replied, "We know that we have in every town another country, which has been founded by the word of God, and we demand of those who are fitted for it by gifts of learning and a pious life, that they should undertake the higher offices in our congregations." And when the same Celsus called on the Christians to take up arms and serve in the imperial army, Origen expressed himself thus: "We give the emperor a divine help, when, according to the apostle's advice, we put on heavenly armour. And the

more pious a man is, the more powerful than that of an ordinary soldier is the aid which he gives the emperor. Christians profit their country more than other men, inasmuch as they train the citizens, and teach them to walk piously before the God on whom the welfare of states depends." With this feeling we see Maximilianus, a youth of twenty-one years of age, die cheerfully a martyr's death in Numidia, under the Emperor Dioclesian, in order that he might do nothing against his conscience. His enthusiasm, which, however, seems to have wanted true Christian self-possession and humility, and which, least of all, could have been appreciated by a selfish Roman magistrate, was exhibited in a most touching manner. When he was called upon to take the soldier's oath, he exclaimed firmly, "You may strike off my head, yet I fight not for the world, but for my God." When they attempted to force on him the military badge, he said, "I cannot wear this sign after that I have received the sign of salvation, the sign of my Lord Jesus Christ, who is the son of the living God, whom ye know not, who suffered for our salvation, whom God has given for our sins; him all we Christians serve, him we follow as the prince of life, the captain of our salvation." "Enter the service," was their reply, "or miserable will be thy death." "I shall not die," he answered, "when I leave this world, my soul will live with my Lord Christ." "Praised be God," was his exclamation when he received the sentence of death.

Those, on the contrary, who maintained that Christians were permitted to exercise magisterial functions, and serve in war, appealed not only to examples from the Old Testament, but also made the case of the centurion at Capernaum, whose faith the Lord praised, an argument for their views, and especially that of the faithful Cornelius. Their opponents were compelled to admit the force of such an appeal, and even the zealous impugner of the military life among Christians, Tertulian himself admitted it to be no despicable argument that they who before their conversion had served in

the army, continued in that profession afterwards, so long as no duties arose to compromise their faith. Some adduced against the right of Christians serving in the army, that the Lord in commanding Peter to put his sword into the sheath, commanded it to all Christians. But the Lord plainly intended an uncalled for appeal to the sword, and only wished to attack man's self-will, which wishes to serve and aid by external violence the kingdom of God, which can be maintained, furthered and protected only by God's word and spirit.

But that the voice of Christians in general was more for than against the acceptance of magisterial offices and service in the imperial army, may be inferred from the fact of our finding, under several emperors, Christians in high offices of the state, and even in the imperial palace. A Christian bishop thus admonishes a high chamberlain as to how he might administer in a Christian manner his office in the court of an emperor who favoured Christianity, but had not as yet been converted to it : "Thou must," says he, "thank God, who has brought thee into high repute with the emperor, that thou mightest spread a good savour of the Christian name to His glory, and the salvation of many. For since the emperor, albeit no Christian, yet thinks that he can trust his life and body more safely to Christians, as his most faithful servants, you must be the more careful in your service, so that by you the name of the Lord may be glorified, and the faith of the emperor increased by his daily communications with you. Far be it from you to grant strangers admittance to the emperor for money, or to be induced by prayers or urgent entreaty to counsel the emperor any thing unseemly. Far be from you all avarice and covetousness, which is idolatry. No unjust gain, no falsehood beseems the Christian who has given himself up to the simple, truthful Saviour. No sinful or indecent conversation should be indulged in by you. Every thing must be done in modesty, kindness, and honesty, in order that by every thing the name of God and our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified."

Thus it was the Christian's watchword, "Give to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," and thus they conscientiously fulfilled their duties to the state. But when the state would compel them to deny their faith, then they obeyed this higher command, "We must hearken unto God more than unto men." They then gave to God what was God's. But even in this case, their opposition was not one of wild turmoil and confusion, their resistance was much more of a passive one. In all persecutions they endured with silent resignation, and while they outwardly submitted, they yet preserved their inward liberty and dignity, "the glorious liberty of the sons of God." They fought with no fleshly weapons, they fought only with the word of God, "the word of the Spirit," and their apparent submission was of itself a victory over the world, until the civic ordinances were so remoulded, that every opposition between their duties as Christians and subjects disappeared, and they could give to Cæsar all that was Cæsar's, without taking from God any thing that belonged to Him.

If we now, my brethren, glance at the public social life of the first Christians, we shall find here likewise, on the one side, the universally acknowledged principle that the believers in the Lord may not love the world, or the things of the world, and on the other side, a difference of views in determining what was to be considered the world, and was clearly incompatible with the profession of Christianity, and what those things were which were allowable to Christians, and in which they could take part without sin. Those various enjoyments and pleasures to which a spirit so entirely given up to vanity eagerly attached itself, formed an important item in the public life of the sensual heathen. We have already touched on this point in our earlier discourses, when we treated of the relation of Christians to the world, and it will therefore suffice to add only a few remarks.

The chief pleasures of the heathen were the bloody gladiatorial games, and the public theatres. From the

first of these the Christians turned with horror, and there ruled among them but one opinion concerning these frightful amusements, that it was quite unworthy a Christian to be present at them; and whosoever was so, was excluded from church communion. Irenæus marks it, and shrinks from it as the greatest denial of a Christian's faith, when certain more than once took part in these bloody sports, hateful alike to God and man; and Tertullian says to the heathen who defended these games, and that very frequently on the ground that criminals sentenced to death were often employed for them: "It is right that criminals should be punished,—and yet the innocent cannot rejoice that a man, a creature like himself, should have so sinned, as that he need be put to death in so fearful a manner. But who will assure me that only the guilty are cast to wild beasts, and condemned to other capital punishments, that this sad fate never overtakes the innocent, either through the vengeful spirit of the judge, or the weakness of the advocate, or the violence of the torture? At least the innocent often offer themselves for these gladiatorial games, to become victims to public pleasure; and as far as concerns those who are sentenced to these games, why is it that a punishment, which should serve for the improvement of the guilty, rather tends to turn them into murderers?"

Not so unanimous was the judgment concerning the public theatrical performances, the comedies and tragedies, racing and running, and the like. In general, indeed, the church declared itself against visiting the theatres; for, on the one hand, they considered them to be intimately connected with idolatry, by serving to enhance the splendours of the idolatrous festivities of the heathen, and by introducing among the masses idolatrous usages; on the other hand, much that was indecent and immoral arose out of them, by which the finer feelings, feelings inseparable from the earnestness of the Christian mind, were injured. They therefore reckoned stage-plays among the things to be renounced by the Christian at his baptism. The Christian was

to take no part in the vain pleasures of the heathen world, but seek other joys which his faith offered him. In the mean time, there were many Christians who had not earnestness enough to sacrifice to the Lord pleasures become dear to them by long habit, and who therefore brought forward all sorts of pretexts to justify them, and represent participation in them as a matter of indifference. Such external pleasures to the eye and ear, they argued, might well consist with religion in the heart; they could during such enjoyments render unto God what was God's; God would not be angry at man's cheerful enjoyment of life. To such Tertullian, among others, replies, "The point is, that we should show how these pleasures cannot agree with true religion and true obedience to God."

As then, my brethren, Christians differed at that time on these points, so do they also now. There are always men of more earnest minds, and men who take matters more easily. "To his own master every man standeth or falleth." We neither wish nor dare to judge. This only is our opinion; the more the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ penetrates, ennobles, and hallows a heart, the less pleasure must it find in the world and its vain passing pleasures. It has its joy in God, and knows other joys than those which the world knows and gives. Let every man then, so dedicate himself from his heart to the Lord, that we may say, "Christ liveth in us, our walk is in heaven;" then every thing will be far from us which belongs not to God, but to the world, and we may exclaim:

"God must receive what is his own,
Thou may'st not give the world thy heart;
With God is life, with God alone,
And anguish is the worldling's part.
To thee, my God, alone to thee,
My heart shall consecrated be."

Amen.

SERMON XX.

THE FAMILY LIFE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

MAY the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, bless us! May he bless us, and may all the world fear Him. Amen.

After having considered the religious and civil life of Christians in the first ages of our church, we will to-day glance at their family life, and with this close the series of meditations which have occupied our attention during so many Sundays. We cannot, indeed, give you much information concerning the family life of the early Christians, but this is caused by the nature of the thing itself, for the life of a Christian family should be calm and secret, and withdrawn from the observation of the world. Do not, then, expect that we can give you a perfect picture of that of which we have but a few traits to put before you. But if we may judge by the produce of the root whence it has proceeded, then must we confess that family life in those primitive times must, indeed, have been a lovely and glorious life, deeply penetrated by the spirit of Christianity, for the effects of it which are to be seen in all ecclesiastical and civil relations bear the mark of this spirit. It could only be a really pious spirit in families that could have given such brilliancy to the public life of Christians, as we have had occasion to notice.

We all, I do not doubt, are agreed, my brethren, that there can be nothing more important than family life. In families are trained and educated for the state its citizens, for the church its members. If, then, the child-

like spirit of faith and piety dwells in families, if husbands and wives, children and servants, shew themselves all equally penetrated by that higher and heavenly mind which the gospel produces, nourishes, and supports, then will this mind, like a living stream which pours its fertilizing waters on all sides, most surely spread from families over the whole circle of life, and all things will bear the stamp of that spirit, to pour which forth over mankind in order to ennoble, sanctify, and inspire them, Jesus Christ came upon earth. Church and state will alike shew the effects of family piety, and enjoy its costly fruits. But if the family be quite opposed to that for which it is intended, viz. to be a nursery of faith and piety, if it be a habitation of frivolity, immodesty, faithlessness, and sin,—then woe to the larger circles of life over which its influence extends! Its poisonous breath, like a desolating plague, will pollute and destroy every thing that it touches, injustice will take the upper hand, and the prosperity of the church and civil society would clearly suffer under it.

The more frequent, then, the complaints that we hear daily, and not without foundation, of the faults of family life, of the miseries of marriage, of the loss of the discipline of children, and of the moral depravation of domestics, the less possible is it to deny that the traces of all this are to be found disturbing the relations both of church and state; and in the latter case, by the spread of illegal and criminal transactions, in the former by the prevailing indifference to all things holy,—so much the more profitable will it be for us to enter into a consideration which will place before us the family life of the early Christians. We shall all have a good opportunity of comparing ourselves with the picture set before us. By this we may learn in what we fail, and what we need. By this we must feel aroused and encouraged to the glorious endeavour to bring back again among us the spirit which inspired and hallowed the family life of the first Christians, and made their family circle a spring of joy, of peace, and happiness. May

God hear our prayers, and visit this our meditation with his rich blessing.

TEXT. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters, according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing, that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.—Col. iii. 18–25; iv. 1.

This is, indeed, my brethren, a glorious picture of family life as it ought to exist among Christians. A look directed unswervingly to the Lord, common love to him, and mutual hearty love to one another, should characterize and sanctify all the inmates of the house. Inspired by one and the same Spirit, all should contemplate their own sanctification, and mutual edification, advancement and support, as the main object of their lives, and thus should every house be a temple of the Lord, a dwelling of God, and a nursery of faith and piety. O would that it were thus every where among us! Would that the spirit of Jesus Christ would enter into all hearts and families, and by its influence hallow them and bless them! Let us examine to-day how far this was the case with the Christians of the first centuries, by considering the family life of those believers.

1. In the relations of marriage.
2. In the discipline of children; and,
3. In the situation of domestics.

Holy Father, sanctify us with thy truth ; thy word is truth. Amen.

I. As Christianity essentially changed all the relations of life, by the holy spirit which it implanted in its professors, so also did it give a new holiness to the quiet of domestic life. The office which it sought to perform, was to glorify family society by a divine mind, and to build up families into temples of God. But the first and most important relation in domestic life is marriage. In this the heathens saw nothing more than a union for low and earthly purposes. It was Christianity that first brought to light the higher, religious, and spiritual import of marriage. It was Christianity that first taught married people to see in their union the fellowship of a higher life, and a heavenly goal to which they were to strive with united powers. Their relation to each other was to be a type of the union between Christ and his church. The husband was to represent the Lord, the wife the church, as St Paul writes, "The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church ; and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." Thus should the husband with self-sacrificing, self-denying love, lead, guide, work, and be vigilant ; and the wife with devoted love follow and attach herself to her husband. Bound up in this love they two should be "one heart and one soul." Both should regard themselves as one flesh, and from this fact consider their union indissoluble. "What an union," exclaims Tertullian, "what an union between two believers who have in common one with another one hope, one desire, one order of life, one service of the Lord ! Both like brother and sister, no separation either between mind or body ; yea, here in its truest sense, two in one flesh ! They kneel together, they pray and fast together, they teach, they warn, they bear with each other, they are together in God's house, at the Lord's Supper, they bear each other's depressions, persecutions, and joys ;

neither conceals ought from the other, neither envies the other; the sick is freely visited, the needy supported; psalms and hymns are ever sounding in their house, and they vie with each other in singing praises to their God. Christ rejoices when he sees and hears such. To such couples he sends his peace; where two are in His name, there is He, and where He is, there the evil one cannot be." O ye spouses, who have heard this lovely description of the wedded life of the first Christians, are traces of this picture to be found in your married state, in your houses? Does that love dwell there which unites your hearts to the Lord, so that with affection you pray, work, enjoy, and suffer one with the other? Is your talk of family devotion, of daily edification, by joint spiritual songs, by joint reading and study of the holy Scriptures? Prove yourselves strictly according to the example of those early Christians. Doubtless many will hereby perceive the wretched state of their wedded life with shame, and, God grant, with sorrow also; for, unhappily in our days, there are many marriages wherein love, peace, unity, fear of God, and devotion, are quite absent, and which have nothing of Christ save the name, which, indeed, they bear most wrongfully, for how can we talk of a Christian marriage where there is a heathen mind? Can we now wonder at the wretchedness and misery of so many marriages, and the nameless sorrow, which is found in so many houses? Can God's blessing be in that place from whence His spirit has been driven? Only pious marriages can be peaceful and happy, as was shewn among the first Christians. All that they did was done in the name of the Lord. The spirit of love, industry, order, discipline, and truth, even in the most trifling matters, ruled in their houses. The husband attended to his office and calling dutifully; the wife thought it her principal part, besides her own household occupation, to undertake the care of the sick and needy, by visiting them, and providing them with food and clothes. And that they might have to give to the needy, they were not only very industrious, but also very simple in their

mode of life. In a time when excessive pomp and corruption of manners prevailed among the heathen, Christian women were marked out by the strictness of their whole demeanour, and their modest simple clothing. Your adornment should, as the apostle Peter says, "Not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, and of putting on of apparel; but the hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." There were, indeed, among Christian women such as were not dead to the spirit of the world, who gave way to vanity, and were wont to say, "Now we have those earthly goods, why should we not use them? For whom are these costly things made, if not for us? For whom shall costly things be, if all prefer those which are not so?" To this Clement of Alexandria replies, "Though all be given us, though all be permitted and allowed us, yet all things profit not, as the apostle, too, says; God has created all things for all men, all things therefore are common, and the rich must not make their riches an exclusive possession, but charity should rather say, I have the means, why should I not give to the needy?" And Tertullian writes: "What cause can you have to go out with ornaments, since you are far from all where ornament is needed? You do not go about in the temples, you do not visit the theatres, or the heathen feasts. You have no other than important reasons for appearing in public. Either the sick are to be visited, or the communion is to be celebrated, or a sermon preached,—and when duties of friendship call you to the heathen, why should you not appear in your ordinary armour, and the more so, as you are going to visit unbelievers, that you may serve as an example to them, and they, by you, may be edified."

As marriage held so high a position in the church, it was natural that it should early have been hallowed by the church. The heads of the community and the deaconesses were consulted with at the betrothal; their duty was to watch that marriages should not be formed to satisfy the dictates of desire, but according to the

will of God, and to his honour. The betrothed then joined in the Lord's Supper, sat together at His table, gave a joint offering to the church, and the whole church thought of them in the church prayer connected with the celebration of the communion. O would that all marriages were now concluded with like piety of mind ! Would that all who are betrothed would, before all things, think of renewing their covenant with the Lord, before they seal the covenant of their hearts, in order that the Lord may give his blessing to their union. But how many are there who never think of seeking for the church's blessing on their common life, much less that they ought to hallow their union in this way. Living in unhallowed marriage, in immodesty and unchasteness, they despise all Christian and ecclesiastical order, and ask not for the blessing of God. On the other hand, the words of Tertullian may convince us how important this consecration was to the early Christians : " How shall we be able to declare the happiness of those marriages which are concluded by the church, sealed by the communion, hallowed by the church's blessing, announced by angels, and declared valid by the heavenly Father ? "

As they considered the union of hearts in the Lord the main matter in marriages, they naturally could not justify connections between heathens and Christians ; for not only would a united religious life be quite impossible in such marriages, but the Christian spouse would be much disturbed by the heathen in their religious exercises. With relation to this Tertullian says : " If a prayer-meeting be held, the husband will set apart the day for the use of the bath ; if a fast be to be observed, he will invite his friends to a feast. There will never be more calls to household duties than when the duties of Christian love summon the wife abroad. And what can she sing to her husband, or her husband to her ? Is it lawful for her to hear any thing from the theatre or the inn ? When will God be mentioned ? When will Christ be called upon ? When will faith be fed by joint reading of the holy Scriptures ? When will

the spirit be refreshed? Where will the divine blessing be?" These same observations may be applied to cases now, where one party is a living member of the Lord's church, and the other either indifferent, or a decided unbeliever. Such marriages are of no value, my brethren. Therefore every one must remember, that he must look in the choice of a partner for "the one thing needful," for a heart full of love to the Lord; for only where the two are one in the Lord, will they exhibit true love one to another, and the blessing of the Lord will only crown their union which is sanctified by faith.

Yet, however much they disapproved of voluntary marriages between Christians and heathens, yet they declared equally decidedly against the wilful separation of an already existing marriage when one party became a Christian. They looked on the previous union as valid in God's sight, and trustfully hoped that the Lord would not only give the believing party strength to overcome all temptations, but also to exercise a sanctifying influence over the unbeliever. "The manner," says Tertullian, "in which his wife was converted to Christianity, may have a peculiar effect on the heathen husband, so that he may hesitate to disturb her. He has perceived great things, he has seen the proofs of that which God has done, he knows that she has become better. Thus will those to whom the grace of God has come home be more easily won." The beholding such a change did not, indeed, always produce so favourable an impression. The heathen party was often embittered by it, and induced to persecute frightfully his Christian spouse. In this case, the believing party was allowed to separate or not as they pleased, but this separation, according to rule, was to proceed from the unbeliever, for Christians then kept strictly to apostolic precepts, according to which, marriage was far too holy for them so lightly to dissolve its bonds, as unhappily is too often the case in our days, where the religious and moral aspect of marriage is but rarely regarded.

II. Yet holy as was among the first Christians the bond of marriage, the work of education was not less holy, nothing was more near to their hearts than to lead their children to the Lord, to train them for his kingdom, to plant in their souls the seeds of faith, and the fear of God, and to feed them with the pure milk of the gospel. Whilst it frequently occurred among the heathen that they exposed their children, or quite neglected them, the Christians considered it their holiest duty to follow the apostolic precept, "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." But they were Christian mothers, in particular, who in the quiet sanctuary of their families employed themselves in the training of their children, and many great and distinguished teachers of the church could thankfully boast that they had received their first training for the kingdom of God from a pious mother. When Paul writes of Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus," he clearly points out, at the same time, who had led him as a child to the holy Scriptures, and aroused and nourished faith in his mind, by saying: "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice." The bible was every where the standard book of instruction for Christians; and in this they were instructed from their youth up. Thus, Leonidas, the father of Origen, caused his son to learn by heart daily a section of the Scriptures, and the son, greedy of knowledge as he was, came to his father for the explanation of what he had learned. Thus the pious Anthusa, the mother of Chrysostom, provided before all things that the bible should be her son's favourite book, and his early and daily employment with God's word preserved him from every allurements which would draw him away from Christ. The example of Christian wives and mothers shone so brightly in this respect, that even heathens were astounded at it, and exclaimed, "What

wives the Christians have!" Among these pious mothers, the church history of the fourth century particularly mentions Nonna and Monica. The former the mother of Gregory Nazianzen, a famous teacher of the church, who was usually called "the theologian," had destined her son for the service of the Lord. Soon after his birth, she bore him to the altar of the church, and placed a copy of the gospels in his little hands. From that time she quite gave herself up to the care of his education, and early raised in him, by means of the word of Scripture, the holy feelings which supported him faithfully and firmly afterwards during the years of his youth, when he had to contend in Athens with temptations to deny his faith. The mother of Augustine, Monica, who lived with exemplary gentleness with a heathen husband, very early attempted to impress on her beloved son, her own pious principles and her earnest love to her Saviour. But when he, being withdrawn from her guidance, fell into great peril of losing his soul among heretical and extravagant men, she mourned his fall more than she would his death. With urgency, and many tears, she besought the bishop to lead him back to the right faith, and although he refused, saying that experience would be most likely to bring her son to the knowledge of his errors, yet he comforted her by declaring, "That it was not possible that a child of so many tears could be lost." In the greatest sorrow she followed the wanderer to Milan. There she was rejoiced by seeing that he no longer lived in the society of those heretics. But when the day of his conversion came, and his whole sinful life lay *behind* him, and his entire being turned to his Lord and Saviour, she rejoiced and cried exultingly, and thanked God with tears of joy, "that he had not only heard her prayer, but done more for her than she had dared to supplicate."

Thus blessedly did believing fathers and mothers work by their doctrine and example on the hearts of their children, and the whole occupation of the family, the pious quiet in which its members lived together, and the

earnestness and modesty with which they followed their respective duties, favoured their labours for the souls of the young. They sang together the psalms of David, and Christian hymns to the praise of their God and Saviour. To this they were exhorted by the teachers of the church, as one among them writes : " Teach your wives and children beautiful songs, and let them sing them not only at their labours, but also at table, for as the evil spirit then takes advantage of your want of preparation, you need especially before and after meals to sing psalms, in order to preserve yourselves from him. Those who introduce David and his harp, call thereby Christ into their house. And let prayers follow your psalms, that thereby our souls and houses may be sanctified. Make thy house a church ! Where there are souls that love God, and songs, and prayers, there is the church ; and if there be but a man and his wife, God is among them, and there is a vast congregation, for Christ and his angels are present."

In the discipline of their children the Christians had a hard contest with the spirit of the world, for among the heathens education was so neglected that even heathen authors complained bitterly of it. One of them thus describes the corruption of the youth : " Fathers have given their place to sons, and themselves take that of sons. The sons are angry, and the fathers afraid. Youth has all the power, and gives itself up to wantonness. Nay, fathers praise their sons for giving themselves up to pleasure, making disturbances in the schools, and say of things for which they ought to punish them severely, that they will one day give them weight among men." With this picture agrees the testimony of a Christian teacher, who writes : " The most of our youth give themselves up without restraint to their wild lusts, without observing any order. Of this the fathers are the cause, who tend their houses with great care, but suffer their sons to run about for a long time unbridled, and suffer them to pollute themselves with unchasteness, gaming, and visiting the immoral playhouses."

With what a wholesome and benevolent effect must

the spirit of Christianity have worked under these circumstances! It taught men to consider their children as God's property, God's children. Parents' love was consequently purified by the love of God, and this spirit of Christian love guided education. From this spirit alone true education can arise. The training to which Christian children were subjected was partly in the ordinary schools and partly in the church. The former were generally conducted by heathens, the latter by their parents and the clergy. In those first centuries they never hesitated to learn from heathen teachers. But the desire for Christian instructors must naturally have soon arisen, and we find, that, at the end of the second century a learned presbyter of Edessa in Syria taught boys to read and write. In the third century, these schools are found scattered up and down the country, and their chief employment was reading and writing, singing, and learning David's psalms. The religious instruction, however, was given by the clergy.

Learn, then, fathers and mothers, from the example of the first Christians, to train your children with all earnestness for the kingdom of God! Before all things take care to make them early acquainted with the holy Scriptures. Do not deem this superfluous! There they first hear God's command. "Honour thy father and thy mother. Children be obedient to your parents in all things! for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." Thus it will be to your own advantage to keep your children to the study of the Scriptures. They will love you the more heartily, obey you the more readily. Be it your especial employment, Christian mothers, to nourish them in their early years with the word of God. Consider what a blessed influence you exercise by this, how much you can contribute in this way to the advancement of God's kingdom, and what great joy you prepare for yourselves in a well educated pious youth. But conscientiously cause your children to be educated in the church and school, and do not detain them from their attendance there. Rather take them yourselves to God's house, and remember that when you depart you leave

your children not earthly and perishable riches, but eternal and imperishable things for their heritage. They will one day thank you for it at the throne of grace. But you, children, and you especially whom a few days since I blessed here, hear again the will of God in the apostle's words : " Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." Forget not the teaching you have received, nor the vow you have made, the duties you have undertaken, and strengthen yourselves to-day for their faithful performance by the celebration of the holy Supper of the Lord, and pray Him to guide and govern you always by his holy Spirit, that you may walk after the pattern of your Redeemer, piously and holily, so that we all, with the angels of God, may rejoice over you. Do not, by continuing obstinately in the service of sin, fritter away the grace of God, and the blessing which has been assured you. Rather strive with industry to " increase in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man," and while you keep your eyes fixed on the heavenly goal to which you are called, remain faithful in your belief, and so live that we may one day be reunited joyfully in heaven, and gladly enter into our Father's joy, to which may His grace help you and all of us !

III. We shall now shortly touch upon the relation subsisting between masters and servants in those first times, and in this matter they held closely to the apostolic precept : " Servants obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers ; but in singleness of heart, fearing God : and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men ; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance ; for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doth wrong shall receive for the wrong that he hath done ; and there is no respect of persons. Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a master in heaven." Among the heathens, the right of property in *persons* was admitted. This was indeed quite hostile

to the spirit of Christianity, for Christianity would have the dignity of humanity acknowledged in all, even the least, and this is plainly not the case with slavery. This is indeed the most unnatural barbarity, the sin that cries most to heaven, which man can commit against man; for slaves are treated not as *persons*, but as *things*. Thus, among the Romans, all the terrors of torture might be employed against innocent slaves, and if a master happened to have been murdered by one of his slaves, hundreds of the slaves in his service, even though their innocence were as clear as day, were executed together with the culprit. Christianity first paved the way to an alteration of this whole system, for it taught the originally equal rights and destination of all men; it revealed God as the Father, Christ as the Redeemer of all men, and laid down this principle, that "with God is no respect of persons." Masters and servants were accordingly compelled to confess themselves sinners before God, and to receive their deliverance from the bondage of sin, the true and highest freedom, the freedom of the children of God, as to both alike, a gift of the free grace of God. Believing servants and masters became brothers in Christ, members of one body, heirs of the same heavenly goods. They prayed and sang together, sat next to each other at the holy love-feasts, received together the body and blood of Christ in the holy sacrament. Thus, were the old relations quite remoulded by the spirit of Christianity, and the outward differences of rank, and station, and property, removed before God, and all Christians united in one body under Christ, the common head. But this change in the idea of property was gradual, and not by sudden revolutions, or violent alterations. Servants were therefore urged to willing obedience, and reminded of the true, higher liberty, without which external liberty is nothing. "Let every man continue in the calling whereunto he is called," taught St Paul. "He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman." The servant was to make a situation of liberty out of his service, while with a free spirit and heart he served his master

for God's sake, and showed himself faithful and obedient to him in all things which were not contrary to God's law. But yet he was permitted to use the opportunity of becoming free. "If thou mayest be free," said the same apostle, "use it rather." Only if such an opportunity did not offer, Christian slaves were not to stand on their rights, and exalt themselves over their heathen masters, but serve in the spirit of love, humility, and self-denial, and thus let their light shine before their master, in order, if possible, to win him for the Lord and heaven. In the same spirit of love, too, should masters walk as regards their servants. "Ye masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a master in heaven."

In this point, also, my brethren, let us walk worthy of the gospel. Are we called to be masters, let our rule be one of love, and let our care be wholly for the bodily and spiritual welfare of those who serve us. May we have an eye to our master in heaven in all that we do. But do you, who by God's will are called to serve, remember that in Christ there is neither bond nor free, that we are all equal before God, and prove yourselves truly free, by serving your master according to the flesh with willing obedience, not by compulsion, not "with eye-service as men-pleasers," but from fear of God. Forget not that you serve the Lord Christ! Let that lighten the burden of your situation, let that arouse you to a due fidelity, that you may one day receive from the Lord "the reward of the inheritance."

Here we close our meditations on the life of Christians in the first centuries of the church. May the Lord give his grace and blessing to us all, that we may zealously follow these patterns of faith and holiness, which have so often edified us, and "grow up in all things unto him, which is the Lord," Jesus Christ the Lord, to whom be honour, for ever and ever! Amen.

APPENDIX.

SHORT NOTICES OF THE LIVES AND ACTIONS OF THE TEACHERS OF THE CHURCH, INTRODUCED IN THE FOREGOING DISCOURSES.

WE shall conclude our picture of the Life of Christians in the Three First Centuries, by a short notice of the teachers of the church whom we have mentioned, for the instruction of readers ignorant of their history. The apostolic fathers commence the list of these teachers, so called, because they were the immediate successors of the apostles of the Lord. The most celebrated were :—

1. CLEMENT OF ROME.

Whether this was he whom St Paul mentions in the Epistle to the Philippians, iv. 3, is uncertain. He was bishop of Rome at the end of the first century, where he was highly esteemed. It is said that Peter himself made him head of the community. We have a letter in his name to the Corinthians, and a fragment of a second. The first was in the early centuries read in many old churches at divine service, together with the canonical writings. It contains brotherly exhortations to concord and a religious life. There are, indeed, other writings in his name, but they were doubted, even by the oldest teachers of the church. Clement died probably at the beginning of the second century.

2. IGNATIUS,

A disciple of the apostle John, was bishop of the church of Antioch, and was distinguished for doctrine, life, and firmness in the profession of the gospel. Under the emperor Trajan he was carried a prisoner to Rome, and there thrown to wild beasts.—(Sermon ix). On the way there, he is said to have written seven letters, six to different churches in Lower Asia, and one to bishop Polycarp of Smyrna. They bear in places the stamp of antiquity, but it is doubtful which and how much of these epistles was really written by him.

3. POLYCARP,

Bishop of Smyrna, like Ignatius a disciple of John, died ninety years old in the persecution under the Roman emperor Aurelius, in the year 176.—(Sermon ix). A letter to the church at Philippi is ascribed to him, and there is no good reason to question it.

The oldest and most famous teachers of the church after the so-called apostolic fathers are the following :—

1. FLAVIUS JUSTINUS,

Commonly called Justin Martyr, was born in Flavia Neapolis, the old Sichem, in Samaria, and suffered martyrdom under the emperor Marcus Aurelius in the year 163, or a little later. He sought for the truth with an earnest and upright heart, until at last he found rest for his soul in belief on the gospel, which he from that time professed most zealously by word, deed, and writing. He relates his own conversion thus : “ When I found all my joy in the teaching of Plato (the most famous of Greek philosophers), and heard the Christians reviled, but saw them fearless and constant in death, and every thing which men consider dreadful, I was convinced that it was impossible that they lived in sin and lusts. I mocked at the opinion of the masses ; I boast of being a Christian, and strive with all my powers to remain so.” He wrote several apologies in favour of the Christians against the false and unjust accusations of the heathen.

2. IRENÆUS,

A pupil of the venerable Polycarp. He went from Asia to France, where he was bishop of the oppressed church at Lyons and Vienne, during the bloody persecution of the year 177, having succeeded their teacher Pothinus, who died a martyr. He was particularly remarkable for his zeal for the maintenance of pure doctrine. We know many of his writings only by name. His chief work, which has for the most part only reached us in an old literal Latin translation, with many important hiatus in the original Greek, contains a refutation of the Gnostic errors.

3. THEOPHILUS,

Lived in the second half of the second century. He was bishop of the church of Antioch, the capital of the eastern part of Roman Asia, under the emperor Marcus Aurelius. After the death of this emperor, under Commodus, he wrote a work in three

books for the defence of the Christians, against the reproaches of the heathen Autolyceus. In this work he shews himself a thinking and a learned man.

4. TERTULLIAN.

Amintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was born at the latter end of the second century, probably at Carthage, where his father served the proconsul as centurion. He was first an advocate, and, in more mature age, was converted to Christianity. After his conversion, the office of presbyter was offered him, but whether this was in Rome or Carthage is doubtful, though probably in the latter. He was the first Latin writer among the Christians who exercised any important influence on the North African church. He was a man of remarkable piety, shining powers, extraordinary attainments, and famous for zeal for the extension of Christianity ; but his glowing imagination led him astray, so that he followed the enthusiastic doctrines of the Montanist sect, which prided itself on higher illumination, and caused great commotions in many parts of the church. The numerous writings of this father which have come down to us, relate partly to the connection between Christians and heathens, partly to the manifold circumstances of Christian life. He died A. D. 220.

5. CYPRIAN.

Tascius Cyprianus of Carthage, received from his father, a rich and careful heathen officer, a solid education, and was originally a teacher of eloquence in his own city. Cecilius, presbyter of Carthage, was, in God's hand, the instrument of bringing him to the knowledge of Christ, and from gratitude to him he took the surname of Cecilius. His conversion took place in the year 246 ; and two years after the church of Carthage, to which he had become endeared by his piety and zeal, gave him the dignity of bishop. He long resisted, before he decided on accepting so important an office, the heavy responsibilities of which he regarded more than its honour. But after he had undertaken it, he administered it with a marked wisdom, power, and fidelity, which fully justified the confidence which the church had reposed in him. During a severe persecution which raged under the emperor Decius, Cyprian deemed it advisable to withdraw for two years from Carthage, and remove himself from the search of the enemies of Christianity ; but as soon as the rage of persecution had in some degree abated, he returned from his place of refuge to his church, which, during its time of affliction, he had incessantly strengthened in courage by his consolatory epistles. Amid many difficulties he administered his office with great Christian wisdom, afterwards safely escaped a

second persecution, but was at last led to martyrdom under the emperor Valerian, and suffered courageously in the year 257.—(Sermon ix). Among the many writings of this distinguished man, his letters are particularly remarkable, for they give us a true picture of the spirit, discipline, manners, and habits of the Christians of that time, and are a glorious testimony of his love to Christ, his piety and zeal for the true faith. Besides this, we may adduce as one of his most remarkable works his three books of testimonies, a collection of the most important texts, to prove that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, and which serve for a foundation of Christian faith and morals.

6. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA.

Titus Flavius Clemens was born, according to some at Athens, according to others at Alexandria. He was born and bred a heathen, and only became a Christian after arriving at manhood, on which account he reckons himself among those who came from heathen sin to faith in the Redeemer, and who from Him received forgiveness of their sins. By free and honest inquiry he was convinced of the truth of Christianity. Even after his conversion, he sought the instruction of distinguished Christian teachers in various places. At last he remained in Alexandria, where he became first a catechist, and afterwards received the office of presbyter. In the year 202, he was forced by a severe persecution under the Emperor Septimius Severus to withdraw from Alexandria. We have but little information concerning his life and residence after this period. We only know that at the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Antoninus Caracalla he was at Jerusalem, from whence, provided with letters of recommendation from the bishop Alexander, he went to Antioch. He died probably about A. D. 218. We possess different writings of his, especially three valuable and learned works, which have a certain connection one with another. Of his other compositions a few fragments only remain.

7. ORIGEN.

Origenis, named Adamantius, was born at Alexandria, A. D. 185. He was the first teacher of the church who tried to reduce Christian doctrine to a scientific connection. His pious father Leonidas, who conscientiously cared for his learned and Christian education, was torn from him in the persecution which the Emperor Septimius Severus instituted A. D. 202 against the Christians. Origen was then seventeen years old, and was left in great poverty by the death of his father, whose income was limited, with a helpless mother and six brothers and sisters still children. A rich and influential lady of Alexandria then took him under her protection ; but he soon left her house, and used

his gifts and acquirements so as to gain a livelihood by tuition. In his eighteenth year he had already become teacher in the catechetical school at Alexandria. His small income subjected him to many privations, to which, however, he added voluntary and extraordinary bodily chastisements, that he might exhibit the perfect life of a Christian philosopher. By this he became of extraordinary repute for sanctity. His glowing zeal in striving for perfection, not being directed by a proper exposition of the Scriptures, led him into many errors, through understanding literally figurative expressions of Christ, and considering precepts applicable only to certain circumstances as valid in all times and places. The most striking error of this kind, which caused him afterwards great sorrow, was his understanding literally the passage, Matthew xix. 12, and practising on himself what he understood as a precept for those who wished to enter most surely into God's kingdom. Origen at first enjoyed the friendship and favour of the bishop Demetrius. But afterwards a time of great sorrow and affliction came on him, when this bishop was roused to jealousy by his great fame, and the honours paid to him. It was especially the honour paid to him by his friends Alexander bishop of Jerusalem, and Theoktistus of Cesarea in Palestine, which produced this. Before this time the proud Demetrius had attacked them for allowing Origen, a layman, to preach in their churches. Origen, however, was afterwards recalled to Alexandria by his bishop, and their friendship was resumed on its old footing. But when, in the year 228, Origen, in a journey to Achaia on church business, visited his friends in Palestine, and they consecrated him presbyter, Demetrius was so angry at this encroachment on his episcopal rights, that he brought the matter before a synod of bishops and presbyters, in which he charged Origen with the before-mentioned error. The laws of the church, indeed, excluded him from clerical office for this youthful enthusiasm, but yet it should have been considered that he had since altered his views of the passage, and condemned the step to which the impetuosity of youth had led him. He was nevertheless deprived of his dignity of presbyter, and forbidden to exercise the office of public teacher in the Alexandrian church. He then repaired to Cesarea, from which place he justified himself against his opponents in letters to his friends. His circle of usefulness became daily more extended, and notwithstanding that his enemies accused him of heresy, he exercised by his writings a most decided influence on the development of church doctrine. The persecution under the Emperor Decius (249-251) appeared as though it would give him the crown of martyrdom. His firmness was severely tried by tortures of every kind, but nothing could shake his faith. He died a few years afterwards, probably from the results of the cruelties he had suffered, A. D. 252 or 253. According to Jerome he died at Tyre, where he was buried.

Origen was doubtless one of the most distinguished teachers and writers of his time, and has exercised a most decided influence on after ages by his various writings. The ancients divided his works into two classes, theological treatises and biblical criticism. They are part of them preserved entire in the original, part are fragmentary, part exist only in Latin versions. He dedicated one work to oppose the heathen Celsus, in eight books, of which the title is, "True discourses against the writings of the Epicurean Celsus."

Out of Origen's school proceeded many famous teachers, and, among others,

8. DIONYSIUS,

First catechist, afterwards bishop of Alexandria (A. D. 247) a man of Christian moderation and mildness, who, as he confesses himself, arrived at belief in the gospel by free investigation. Even as Christian and teacher of the church he preserved the freedom of the spirit in search and inquiry. He read and studied, uncorrupted, all the writings of heretical teachers, and only threw them aside when he knew them well, and was able to overthrow them by argument. In the year 257, he was driven away by the persecution under the Emperor Valerian, but even during the three years of his banishment his flock was unceasingly under his care and guidance. In the year 260 he returned to Alexandria, where new cares and sorrows awaited him. Not only were there factions and parties in the city, but famine and pestilence broke out there, and grievous differences arose in his own flock, which required his interference. In these difficult circumstances, Dionysius behaved always with the dignity, wisdom, and mildness which become a Christian bishop, and succeeded in restoring the unity and peace of his church. He died A. D. 264.

Of the many epistles of this bishop, unhappily all but a few perfect remains and numerous fragments are lost.

INDEX

TO THE

QUOTATIONS FROM THE FATHERS.



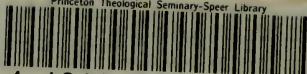
- | | | |
|-------------|---------------|--|
| Sermon I. | p. 5, l. 28, | Just. M. Ap. i. 45. |
| | p. 5, l. 33, | Iren. Adv. Hæret. L. ii. c. 22. |
| | p. 9, l. 29, | Celsus, B. iii. 152, 3. |
| Sermon II. | p. 27, l. 7, | Composer of Letter to Diognetes. |
| | p. 28, l. 8, | Just. M. Ap. i. p. 20. ed. Thirlb.
[Ap. ii. C. 17.] |
| | p. 28, l. 23, | Origen c. Celsum. i. 67. [p. 53. ed.
Spencer.] |
| Sermon III. | p. 36, l. 31, | Tert. Apologeticus, C. xxxix. |
| | p. 37, l. 37, | Clem. Al. Pædagog. L. iii. 256, 257. |
| | p. 39, l. 22, | Cypr. Ep. lx. [Ep. lxii. ed. Ox.] |
| | p. 41, l. 15, | Cypr. p. 205, ed. Ox. |
| | p. 41, l. 37, | Euseb. vii. 22. |
| | p. 42, l. 31, | Cypr. Lib. de Mortalitate. |
| Sermon IV. | p. 47, l. 32, | Clem. A. Stromat. L. vii. p. 722. |
| | p. 48, l. 6, | ~~~~~ Stromat. L. vii. p. 728. |
| | ~~~~~ l. 14, | Origen, de Orat. § 12 [§ 57, ed. Read-
ing.] |
| | ~~~~~ l. 22, | ~~~~~ C. 22 [§ 57, ed. Read-
ing.] |
| | p. 49, l. 16, | Tert. C. xxviii. de Orat. : in the pieces
first published by Muratori, vol.
iii. Anecdotorum Bibl. Ambros. |
| | p. 51, l. 7, | Cyprian, Ep. vii. |
| | ~~~~~ l. 23, | Origen, de Orat. C. xxxi. |
| | p. 53, l. 25, | Tert. C. xxvii. |
| | p. 54, l. 4, | Origen, de Orat. § 13 [§ 35, ed. Read-
ing. Lond. 1728.] |
| | p. 56, l. 9, | Tert. de Orat. |
| Sermon VI. | p. 77, l. 34, | Tert. Apologet. C. xlii. |
| | p. 80, l. 21, | Clem. A. Strom. L. iii. p. 446, &c. |
| | p. 81, l. 6, | Clem. A. Τις ὁ σωζόμενος πλῆσιος, § 11. |
| Sermon VII. | p. 91, l. 3, | Tert. de Idololatria, C. vi. |
| | ~~~~~ l. 34, | Tert. Apologet. C. xxxiv. |
| | p. 92, l. 12, | Tert. De Idololatria, C. xv. |
| | ~~~~~ l. 22, | Celsus, Lib. viii. p. 435. |

- Sermon VII. p. 94, l. 17, Iren. Lib. i. C. vi. Ὡς μηδε της παρα Θεω και ανθρωποις μεμισημενης της των θηριομαχων και μονομαχιας ανδροφωνα θεας απεχεσθαι ενιους αυτων.
p. 94, l. 23, Cypr. Ep. ad. Donat.
p. 95, l. 10, Tert. de Spect. xv. xvii. xxv.
p. 96, l. 23, The author of the treatise "De Spectaculis," in Cyprian's works.
p. 97, l. 3, Cypr. Ep. vi. ad Eucrat. [Ep. lxi. ed. Pam. ii. ed. Ox.]
p. 98, l. 6, Tert. C. xxxix.
~~~~~ l. 23, Author of work "De Spectaculis," in Cyprian.
- Sermon VIII. p. 103, l. 32, Partly quoted in Euseb. iv. 15, but more fully in collection of Patres Apostolici.
- Sermon IX. p. 104, l. 19, Cypr. Ep. iv. [Ep. v. Bp. Fell's ed.]  
p. 118, l. 23, Passa Sti Cypriani.
- Sermon X. p. 121, l. 35, Acta Mart. ap. Ruinart, p. 94.  
p. 138, l. 15, Cypr. Ep. lvi. [Ep. lviii. ed. Ox. 1682.]
- Sermon XI. p. 144, l. 34, Cypr. De Mortalitate [sub finem.]  
p. 147, l. 30, Ibid.
- Sermon XII. p. 158, l. 18, Contra Celsum, viii. p. 400, [p. 389 ed. Spencer.]  
p. 159, l. 7, Orig. De Orat. C. xxxi. [C. lxvi. ed. Reading.]  
~~~~~ l. 14, Clem. A. Stromat. vii. 715. B.  
~~~~~ l. 16, Tert. De Orat. C. xxiv.  
~~~~~ l. 33, Clem. A. Pædagog. iii. p. 256.  
p. 161, l. 36, Acta Mart. S. Just. ap. Ruinart.
p. 168, l. 21, Clem. A. Pædagog. iii.
- Sermon XIII. p. 172, l. 37, Ign. ad Magn. § 9.
- Sermon XIV. p. 185, l. 11, Just. M. Apol. ii. [Apol. i. § 77.]
- Sermon XV. p. 200, l. 22, Cypr. Ep. lxxvi. ad Magn. [Ep. lxi. ed. Ox.]
p. 203, l. 4, Ir. ii. C. xxii. § 4.
~~~~~ l. 35, Cypr. Ep. lix. [Ep. lxiv. ed. Ox.]
- Sermon XVI. p. 215, l. 39, Just. M. Dial. cum Tryp. Jud. p. 345. [340, ed. Jebb.]  
p. 216, l. 5, Iren. iv. 18.
- Sermon XVII. p. 228, l. 13, Tertul. ad Nation. i. 5.  
p. 230, l. 9, Tertul. de Pœnitentiâ, C. ix.  
~~~~~ l. 22, Orig. c. Celsum, iii. p. 147 [143, ed. Spencer.]  
p. 231, l. 12, Tert. de Pœnit., C. ix.
~~~~~ l. 35, Cypr. Ep. lxxv.  
p. 232, l. 4, Cypr. Ep. lii. ad Antonian. [Ep. lv. ed. Ox.]

- Sermon XVIII. p. 240, l. 37, Cypr. Sermo de Lapsis.  
p. 241, l. 32, Cypr. Ep. lii. [Ep. lv. ed. Ox.]  
p. 242, l. 17, Cypr. Ep. lv. p. 112, ed. Ox.
- Sermon XIX. p. 249, l. 22, Just. M. Ap. ii. [Ap. Prim. p. 26,  
ed. Thirlb. 1722.]  
~~~~~ l. 37, Tert. de Idololatria, C. xv.  
p. 254, l. 12, Tert. de Cor. Mil. C. xi.
~~~~~ l. 32, Tert. de Idololatria, C. xviii.  
p. 255, l. 31, Orig. c. Celsum, viii.  
~~~~~ l. 38, Orig. c. Celsum, viii.  
p. 260, l. 13, Tert. v. c. Ch. l.
- Sermon XX. p. 264, l. 30, Tert. ad Uxor. L. i. C. viii.
p. 266, l. 16, Clem. A. Pædagog. Lib. ii. C. xi.
p. 267, l. 31, Tert. de Cultu Fœm. ii.
p. 268, l. 21, Tert. ad Uxor. ii. 8.

FINIS.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01145 3935

